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Seventy-second session

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New York

President: Mr. Lajčák ..... (Slovakia)

The meeting was called to order at 6.05 p.m.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Wilfred Elrington, Attorney General and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Belize.

Mr. Elrington (Belize): On behalf of the Government and the people of Belize, I extend our heartfelt condolences to the populations of our sister countries in the Caribbean for the destruction and loss of life and property caused by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. Belize stands united with other friendly countries of the world to assist and to render our full support to our sister countries and friends in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). I also extend Belize's warmest feelings of solidarity and sympathy to the people of Mexico, our immediate neighbours to the north, as they commence a difficult recovery process following the death and destruction caused by the two recent earthquakes.

As you observed in your opening statement (see A/72/PV.3), Mr. President, you have assumed the presidency of the General Assembly at a most challenging time for multilateralism. Be assured nonetheless that my Government and people have every confidence in your leadership, and I pledge to you our full and active support as you embark on the task of addressing the agenda of the seventy-second session of the Assembly, focusing on people and striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet.

With regard to the Belizean experience, Belize celebrated its thirty-sixth year of independence on 21 September. In the 36 years since independence, we have matured into a unified nation, embracing all peoples in the fabric of our society and enjoying a peaceful existence. We have worked assiduously to uplift every Belizean, especially those who have been victims of anachronistic prejudices, and we have done so with an eye to ensuring that successive generations can benefit from the fruits of our labours and our natural resources. Our development has been modest in relative terms, but progressive and steady.

We have readily embraced the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and launched our Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy for Belize 2016-2019, which incorporates the global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Our nationally determined contributions under the Paris Agreement further complement the SDGs. We are already seeing the dividends of that early investment in policy and action. Belize has met several goals on road safety, marine protection and sustainable fisheries.

These early accomplishments are mere benchmarks. We know that for our sustainable development, we must go above and beyond such accomplishments, so my Government is setting even more ambitious targets. At the Ocean Conference, we announced our commitment to further strengthening the legislative and regulatory framework on fisheries, increasing our marine reserves from 3 per cent to 10 per cent of our territorial waters and implementing legislation to curb the use of plastics. Among our ambitious climate-action

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contributions, Belize is committed to zero-emissions growth in its forestry sector and aims to achieve 85 per cent renewables in electricity production by 2027.

In addition to our actions at the national level, we are also undertaking regional action by leveraging the strength of the Caribbean Community to optimize results for all our peoples by uniting our efforts aimed at fighting disease and security threats. Belize proudly hosted the launch of the CARICOM First Ladies and Spouses of Prime Ministers Network in support of the Implementation of SDG 5 and the Every Caribbean Woman, Every Caribbean Child initiative. Our leaders are also renewing and deepening efforts to tackle non-communicable diseases through targeted approaches aimed at promoting healthy lifestyles, starting with the youngest members of our communities.

For our region, security and climate change are equally fundamental threats to our survival. The region has risen to meet these challenges by adopting its own counter-terrorism strategy and pioneering innovative approaches to building resilience and facilitating its transition to low- and no-carbon economies across the region.

I will now address the challenges and opportunities of financing people-centred development. The cost of implementation is by no means negligible. At the national level, conservative estimates put the cost of implementation of our Growth and Sustainable Development Strategy at a quarter of Belize's gross domestic product. Belize's development finance strategy mirrors the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action. We are tapping into a mix of domestic and international resources through various channels, keeping in mind the inhospitable international policy environment. Domestically, my Government is strengthening its capacity to improve revenue collection.

Incentivizing business investment in Belize is also a critical action point for my Government. Like other vulnerable small island developing States (SIDS), Belize saw a sharp decline in foreign direct investment over the period from 2015 to 2016. As of 2016, foreign direct investment flows to SIDS represented only 0.2 per cent of overall global flows. To buck this downward trend, we have reformed the incentives for doing business in Belize to comport with the policy space permitted by our World Trade Organization obligations.

We have also reformed key institutions to ensure the integrity of our financial services industry. The Government has strengthened the institutional capacity, legislative framework and supervisory mandate of its financial intelligence unit. The Caribbean Financial Action Task Force has determined that Belize is in compliance with international standards. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Global Forum on Transparency and Exchange of Information for Tax Purposes, which at present sets international standards on tax cooperation, has listed Belize as a largely compliant tax jurisdiction, following Belize successful completion of the Global Forum peer review of its legislative, regulatory and administrative framework.

In 2013, Belize adopted the multilateral Convention on Mutual Administrative Assistance in Tax Matters, the purpose of which is to facilitate cooperation among jurisdictions with a view to combating tax avoidance and evasion internationally. Additionally, Belize is committed to the Automatic Exchange of Information standard and has entered into 31 bilateral Exchange of Information agreements.

Nevertheless, Belize's reputation, financial industry and economy remain vulnerable as a result of unilateral declarations that have labelled our jurisdiction as uncooperative or non-compliant. Such unilateral declarations cause undue damage to Belize's reputation and the integrity of its financial services industry. They also dissuade investors and undermine the significant legislative and administrative measures undertaken by our Government to ensure Belize's compliance with international standards and legal obligations. But even worse, they undermine the very legitimacy of the institutions that promulgate the global standards by which we are all supposed to be measured.

In Belize's view, the United Nations must enforce the necessary checks and balances that are part of the international financial architecture. We see a role for the United Nations in acting as a central multilateral forum where efforts are consolidated and coherence and international cooperation promoted on issues that support domestic resource mobilization. Because of its universal nature, the United Nations is in the best position to foster a more inclusive, transparent and consultative process for addressing such issues as international cooperation on tax matters and the broader question of financing for sustainable development.

Notwithstanding our best efforts, we cannot meet the costs of implementation with our domestic

resources alone. We rely on our bilateral partners from the North and the South. We have also developed strong working relationships with multilateral development banks. But with our current status as a middle-income country, our access to grant and concessional financing is severely constrained. Belize is in the unenviable position of being a heavily indebted middle-income country. Our external public debt stands at 70 per cent of our gross domestic product, or $2.3 billion, and the domestic debt at 22 per cent of gross domestic product, or $750 million. The cost of interest for these debt obligations is $109 million for the current fiscal year alone. Without viable alternatives, my Government has to finance its development by contracting loans at market rates.

My Government has endeavoured to appeal to our private creditors to renegotiate the onerous bonds that threaten to upend the sustainability of our debt. However, the world of international private finance does not place a high priority on public policy, much less the public policy of a foreign Government. With the ongoing crises resulting from the withdrawal of correspondent banking services from relationships with our indigenous financial institutions, the entire Caribbean is experiencing this reality. To the likes of Bank of America or JPMorgan Chase it matters not that ending correspondent banking relations with a national bank or a central bank effectively excludes that nation from the global financial system, and, in response, the country where those banks are located offers nothing more than sympathy. That is a major concern, not just for the Caribbean but for all developing countries, given the universal pivot towards the private sector financing the development agenda.

It would behoove the United Nations to develop a participatory framework for the private sector in order to keep account of their commitments made and actions taken to advance global goals. The High-level Political Forum offers a useful platform for integrating such a framework. The United Nations should also develop appropriate capacities to track the alignment of private financial flows with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is also incumbent on the United Nations to accelerate progress in redefining development metrics to respond to the anomaly of heavily indebted middle-income countries, particularly those with unique challenges, such as small island developing States.

Belize welcomes the Secretary-General's commitment to SIDS. I would like to take this opportunity to commend him and you, Mr. President, for holding a special session on Hurricane Irma. I wish to extend my own Government's pledge of solidarity to the members of our Caribbean family that were devastated by that unprecedented storm and, more recently, by Hurricane Maria. Hurricanes Irma and Maria have exposed the acute humanitarian challenge and the equally acute development challenge that SIDS face. That challenge is, without question, a global one, as the Secretary-General has rightly stated. We look forward to engaging in action-oriented discussions in order to facilitate piloting such financing-for-sustainable-development initiatives across SIDS as debt swaps for climate action and the expansion of climate risk insurance, and to support adaptation measures at individual to national levels.

The United Nations can serve as a global incubator for genuine and durable multi-stakeholder partnerships that can foster innovation and entrepreneurship in SIDS. At the national level, we are ready to engage in discussions on how to ensure that the United Nations is fit for our country's purposes on the ground as we aim to implement the ambitious 2030 Agenda and develop country-specific solutions for sustainable financing.

Belize fully agrees with the Secretary-General that the United Nations has a crucial role to play as a catalyst, an innovator, a convenor and a champion of what works. Since its inception, the United Nations has been orchestrating a rules-based framework for helping countries to cooperate and take collective action. As we embrace a new era of openness, transparency and accountability, United Nations operations must also reflect the openness, transparency and accountability of all who engage and benefit from international cooperation.

We depend on the United Nations to champion and protect the rule of law, ensure the universality of core agreements and develop new treaties in order to address gaps where they exist. That is why Belize looks to the United Nations as a firewall between democracy and tyranny, between social justice and oppression, and between the global good and self-interest. Its ultimate role is to protect the interests of humankind as a whole. In this spirit, we expect the United Nations to act, and we therefore insist that the overdue reforms of the peace and security architecture of the United Nations,

especially the Security Council, be completed forthwith so that there can be no obstacle to action.

Belize has long supported the United Nations in fulfilling its role. We have supported its endeavours to forge new partnerships for development, advance global health policies, bring justice to victims of crimes against humanity, protect the most vulnerable and control the spread of weapons of mass destruction, including small arms and light weapons. We have been at the forefront of the global fight to protect and preserve our shared natural environment against environmental degradation and climate change and to ensure the sustainable use of the planet, especially of our oceans, which sustain life on earth. Through the Caribbean Community, we are also leading the charge to deliver reparations to the victims of slavery and their descendants.

For Belize, as a State Member of the United Nations, advocating for peaceful cooperation among States, the right to self-determination for all peoples and the promotion and protection of human rights is a non-derogable duty. We therefore cannot remain silent wherever injustice persists. We see injustice perpetrated against the people of Taiwan, who uphold the core purposes and principles of the United Nations, while, in contrast, the United Nations fails to uphold those purposes and principles with respect to them.

For more than half a century, the people of Cuba have been the victims of the injustice of an egregious and illegal unilateral embargo. We also see injustice continuing to cast a shadow over the peoples of Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Western Sahara and South Sudan, among others.

The situation in Venezuela is one that continues to challenge all of us in our region and hemisphere. Belize fully subscribes to the position of CARICOM, which underscores respect for international law and international principles and urges resolution through dialogue. To that end, CARICOM has offered its own good offices.

In our region, we continue to witness the suffering of our Haitian brothers and sisters. Belize cannot remain silent in the face of such intolerable injustice, nor should the rest of the world. We support United Nations efforts aimed at bringing justice to all who have been alienated, oppressed, victimized or silenced. When we fail to uphold our duty to the norms and values of the United Nations, humankind itself suffers. But when we defend those norms and values, there is no greater redemption. The Haitian people know this fact all too well, and, with good reason, they look hopefully towards the new United Nations approach to cholera in Haiti and the establishment of the United Nations Mission for Justice Support in Haiti.

Similarly, when Belize's territorial integrity was at issue, Belize turned to the United Nations to defend the country's sovereignty over its land, and, for as long as we have been a dutiful Member State, we have had peace. We want that peace to endure, so we have taken every possible step to bring Guatemala to the table of justice in order to resolve that country's unfounded claim on our territory.

In 2008, Belize and Guatemala agreed to refer the Guatemalan claim to Belizean territory to the International Court of Justice, the Organization's judicial arm, subject to the will of each of our peoples. Both Belize and Guatemala are poised to hold the requisite referendums to obtain our peoples' consent. In the meantime, with the full support of the Organization of American States, we continue to take a constructive approach to our bilateral relations and to maintaining peace along the borders. Belize remains committed to working with Guatemala to finalize a cooperation mechanism for the Sarstoon River in order to minimize the potential for tensions or incidents along Belize's southern border.

In conclusion, for the past 36 years, we Belizeans have lived in harmony with one another and with nature. Together with our leaders and with the support of other friendly nations, we have built a strong nation by the sweat of our brows. We have honoured our Constitution, which enshrines the principle of social, economic and environmental justice for all. We will persevere in our efforts to achieve our just objectives and look to the United Nations for its continued support. In turn, the United Nations and every Member State can rest assured that Belize will defend our community of nations and its purposes and principles. Our national motto is "*Sub umbra floreo*" — "In the shade I flourish". In the shade of the United Nations, we shall all flourish.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Nicola Renzi, Minister for Foreign and Political Affairs and Justice of the Republic of San Marino.

Mr. Renzi (San Marino) (*spoke in Italian; English text provided by the delegation*): On behalf of the Government of the Republic of San Marino, I would like to congratulate you, Sir, on your election

as President of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session and to wish you a successful term. Your experience as Minister for Foreign Affairs of Slovakia and your deep knowledge of international affairs are invaluable resources for the United Nations. The San Marino delegation assures you of its utmost willingness to work with you in the course of this session of the General Assembly.

My country would also like to offer its heartfelt congratulations to His Excellency Mr. António Guterres as he embarks on fulfilling his new mandate as Secretary-General. We thank him for the energy and determination he has already shown in his first months of activity at the helm of the Organization.

I am grateful for the theme chosen for this session — "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet" — where issues that the Republic of San Marino holds dear, such as human rights, peace and sustainable development, are at the heart of the agenda. It is a cross-cutting theme, since upholding human rights is reflected in every action the United Nations takes in the service of peace, security, justice and sustainable development. In the coming years, the international community will have to do all it can to achieve these objectives.

To our dismay, in every situation of armed conflict we are witnessing the systematic violation of human rights. Refugees and migrants are subject to discrimination, various forms of abuse and trafficking. Racial and religious discrimination and intolerance persist in many parts of the world. Inequality and social exclusion are at the root of the numerous and increasingly complex challenges that the United Nations is called upon to address. Unfortunately, in recent years we have seen an increase in inequality and marginalization, not only in developing countries but even in the richest ones, where increasingly large sections of the population struggle against growing poverty. This is a threat to global stability, as it leads to an erosion of confidence in national and multilateral institutions and fuels nationalist and populist movements. Collective commitment to human rights is therefore essential.

The relationship between peace, security and respect for human rights is undeniable. Measures for the protection and promotion of human rights are essential to preventing conflicts and ensuring peace. Moreover, peace and sustainable development are complementary concepts. More inclusive and peaceful societies provide better conditions for sustainable development, and vice versa.

The complexity of the challenges that the United Nations must tackle today is unparalleled in the history of the Organization. Their interconnected nature reminds us that countries must act together to be more effective in the fight against climate change, global terrorism and poverty and to build more inclusive, safe and just societies for all. As the Secretary-General stated in his report on the work of the Organization (A/72/1), it is important to rekindle faith in multilateralism and, in particular, in the United Nations. Our country has always believed in the power of dialogue and respect for others, which are values that underpin the peaceful coexistence among peoples.

The profoundly egalitarian nature and unquestioned legitimacy of the United Nations, together with the universal character of participation in it, unequivocally reaffirm its value and central role as a forum for solving global problems. The various religious and cultural traditions present in the Organization should be not an obstacle but rather a valuable resource for achieving global solutions through mediating and synthesizing diversities.

The United Nations must adapt quickly to new global challenges and to the new opportunities offered by an increasingly interconnected world so that it can be effective in carrying out its mandate. Reform is therefore crucial to future stability in the world and to the maintenance of international peace and security, which must remain at the centre of our actions. We reject any diminution of the role of the United Nations just because a universal agreement on the reforms needed to improve its functioning cannot be found.

The Republic of San Marino is attentively following the revitalization process of the General Assembly, which must continue to be a meeting point and forum for the exchange of ideas and discussion, leading to solutions rooted in a strong consensus. Similarly, Security Council reform should be an objective of all Member States. As we have stated on previous occasions, we believe that intergovernmental negotiations contribute to agreements that reflect a broad and strong political consensus representing the interests of all negotiating groups.

San Marino calls for reform that can make the Security Council more democratic, transparent, efficient and accountable. This goal can be achieved

only through continuous dialogue among States, with the understanding that it is essential to go beyond initial positions if the broadest agreements possible are to be achieved. The Republic of San Marino supports the Secretary-General's reform agenda, which features streamlining procedures, decentralizing decision-making processes and achieving greater transparency and accountability.

Human rights are the raison d'être of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The Agenda defines our future and a vision of a peaceful, inclusive and safe society where the burden of poverty has been eradicated, prosperity is shared and decent work is available to all. Together with the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, it also reflects the ambition and commitment of Member States to reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 2020, giving our planet and its inhabitants the chance to live longer and in better conditions. The 2030 Agenda is ambitious because it is universal: it integrates the three dimensions of sustainable development — social, economic and environmental — and is applicable to all States.

A year after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, their effective implementation is the real challenge of today. In many areas covered by the 2030 Agenda, progress has unfortunately not been in line with hopes. For example, much more needs to be done for the 700 million people living in extreme poverty and experiencing malnutrition. More targeted actions should be implemented to reduce maternal mortality and gender inequality, ensure inclusive and equitable educational systems, invest in sustainable energy and provide health care to wider segments of the population. The implementation of the 2030 Agenda is the responsibility of individual States, which should keep their promises by incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals into their development legislation and policies.

A cultural revolution must be part of our policies in the coming years. In the Republic of San Marino, for instance, we have promoted education initiatives on sustainable development in various sectors, including education, construction, waste disposal and public transport. As a complement to national Governments, civil society and the private sector also play important roles in mobilizing the resources needed for the implementation of the Agenda. In this regard, San Marino recalls the important results achieved following the adoption of the Addis Ababa Action Agenda, which identified various concrete measures that could be taken to finance development and laid the foundation for the global programme contained in the 2030 Agenda.

The 2030 Agenda states that the rights of the most vulnerable people must be promoted and protected. The Republic of San Marino has always paid special attention to the most vulnerable groups — women, children, the elderly and the disabled. San Marino, which was among the first countries to become signatories to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, intends to fully implement that Convention by adopting legislative frameworks and policies that favour the inclusion and full participation of people with disabilities in the employment, social and cultural contexts of the country.

Gender equality must be a goal of the international community. Unfortunately, women are still victims of discrimination and violence in many parts of the world, including in the most developed countries. In support of the initiatives promoted by the Secretary-General, San Marino has signed the voluntary compact on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse in United Nations peacekeeping missions. We believe that the rights and dignity of the victims of sexual abuse should be at the heart of our collective efforts.

Children are sadly the most vulnerable group of all and can be victims of violence, abuse and exploitation. Protecting their rights must be at the heart of our actions. San Marino supports the Ministerial Declaration made at this year's High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development, which reaffirms the commitment of the international community to children, focusing in particular on eradicating poverty, promoting their participation and eliminating all forms of violence and discrimination.

Refugees and migrants continue to be subject to violent discrimination. The enormous humanitarian challenge posed by large movements of refugees and migrants can be addressed only through greater cooperation and better sharing of responsibilities and costs among all States. The movement-of-peoples phenomenon has reached a level unprecedented in the history of the United Nations. The Republic of San Marino supports the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants, adopted in September 2016. It contains a series of bold commitments to addressing the challenges posed by the large flows of migrants and

refugees, but it also provides for developing a plan for the implementation of these commitments.

In addition to dealing with large movements of refugees and migrants, the United Nations has also been called on to address grave and complex humanitarian crises. As the Secretary-General mentioned in his report on the activity of the Organization, approximately 96 million people, in more than 40 countries, more than half of whom were women and children, received humanitarian assistance in 2017. The report shows that in 2016, natural disasters caused the displacement of approximately 31 million people, three times more than those forced to flee because of armed conflicts. An unprecedented food crisis has affected more than 20 million people on the African continent.

The Republic of San Marino has always supported cooperation projects and emergency interventions under the auspices of numerous international organizations, in particular entities within the United Nations family. Our country is grateful to the Secretary-General for the rapid and crucial action he has undertaken for populations facing humanitarian emergencies, as well as to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Central Emergency Response Fund for their rapid response and substantial contribution.

Today, the United Nations is engaged in the widest deployment of peacekeeping operations and special political missions in its history. Recent and ongoing wars have caused great suffering for civilians, unprecedented global humanitarian crises, tragic, massive movements of migrants and refugees, and an increase in terrorism, violent extremism, populism and intolerance.

Despite the negotiations for a political solution in Syria, which resumed in January under the auspices of the United Nations, facilitated by the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General, to whom the Republic of San Marino gives its full support, the situation remains highly volatile, has led to a massive displacement of civilians and, at the same time, poses a threat to the stability of the entire region.

The Republic of San Marino supports the Secretary-General in his initiative aimed at strengthening prevention activities and conflict mediation. In this regard, my country will participate in the Italian initiative for the creation of a network of women mediators in the Mediterranean area, the purpose of which is to contribute to peace processes through prevention and mediation. By establishing relations with the various national or regional stakeholders and working to achieve sustainable peace, the United Nations should be able to anticipate the causes of a possible conflict.

More and more frequently, terrorism and violent extremism are generated and fuelled by armed conflicts, exacerbating ethnic, religious, political and economic tensions. Violations of human rights by such terrorist groups as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, Al-Qaida and Boko Haram are very serious and include murder, kidnapping, forced conversion, human trafficking, slavery, sexual abuse, and the destruction of places of religious or cultural significance for ethnic and religious minorities.

The self-proclaimed Islamic State and its associated forces have also been responsible for numerous deadly terrorist attacks in Europe, Asia and Africa. The international community and the United Nations must act so that those responsible for those heinous crimes are brought to justice. San Marino supports the activities and initiatives of the United Nations in promoting justice and the rule of law, which form an integral part of the agenda to promote and protect human rights.

My country welcomes the actions taken by the Secretary-General, with the support of the General Assembly, to establish the Office of Counter-Terrorism, headed by an Under-Secretary-General, with a view to enhancing coherence in United Nations action and provide better assistance to Member States in their own fight against terrorism.

Disarmament activity plays a crucial role in maintaining international peace and security. The recent tests carried out by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the context of a nuclear-weapons programme threaten security globally as well as regionally and underline the need for robust disarmament and non-proliferation policies. San Marino strongly condemns the launching of missiles by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and demands that it cease such activity. We also call for the sanctions set forth in recent Security Council resolutions to be fully implemented by all States.

The Republic of San Marino took part in the negotiations that led to the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons last July. The Treaty is an important step in efforts aimed at achieving the shared goal of a world without nuclear weapons.

In order to address today's many and complex challenges, the United Nations must be more effective and flexible. Member States must assume their responsibilities in that regard, including that of helping our Organization live up to its mandate, which is to protect the citizens of the world.

Thanks to its centuries-long history of peace and freedom, San Marino is a State with a strong identity. Although our State is small, it is proud to make its contribution to the United Nations community. Everything we do is aimed at restoring the capacity and authority of the United Nations, so that it can continue to be the indispensable reference point of the international community.

The President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Aurelia Frick, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister for Education and Minister for Cultural Affairs of the Principality of Liechtenstein.

Ms. Frick (Liechtenstein): Mr. President, it is good to see you presiding over this session of the General Assembly. We know that we are in very able hands, and I look forward to working closely with you. We also salute the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for his leadership. I am confident that he will chart an intelligent course for us to make the changes we wish to see in the United Nations.

Mr. President, you have proposed for this session the theme "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet", which takes us back to the very beginning of the Charter of the United Nations, written on behalf of the peoples of the world. To this day, the United Nations symbolizes great hope around the globe — hope for peace, hope for justice and hope for a life of dignity and decency, which represent the basic ambition of every human being. Yet fulfilling these hopes remains elusive for millions, and for millions of others those hopes have been shattered.

Intolerance and nationalism were the drivers of the Second World War, and the Organization was founded in response to them. It is a place where we seek solutions together, instead of pursuing nationalist agendas. Only by embracing this understanding will we be able to achieve the best results at the United Nations. The horrors of armed conflict — the tragedy of the Second World War in particular — led the founding nations to pledge to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. We have make a collective commitment to removing threats to peace and to suppressing acts of aggression. But today we often manage and contain armed conflict rather than preventing it in the first place. We must do better.

This year we have the opportunity to take a historic step forward. For the first time since the creation of the United Nations, we can give an international tribunal jurisdiction over the crime of aggression. The most serious forms of the illegal use of force will be punishable. The tribunal in charge — and the centrepiece of our common fight for accountability — will be the International Criminal Court (ICC). I appeal to those assembled here today to live up to the commitment we made when we signed onto the United Nations Charter. Let us enforce the prohibition of the illegal use of force by making it punishable in the highest court of criminal law we have.

Next year, we will celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the ICC. With jurisdiction over the most serious violations of international law, the establishment of the Court was an enormous achievement, but, today, it still lacks universality. There remains therefore a significant impunity gap. A very large number of people in the world do not benefit from its legal protection.

These people must not be left without hope. They too deserve real prospects for justice. The people of Syria, for example, have suffered unspeakable violence. The crimes committed against them have been atrocious. And the silence with which we met those atrocities for so long puts us all to shame. But finally, late last year, we came together to create a real possibility for justice — the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of those Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, the accountability mechanism established by the General Assembly in resolution 71/248. The Mechanism itself will not conduct criminal proceedings against perpetrators. But it could be critically important in the preparation of case files for prosecution in courts with jurisdiction. This is a decisive step forward. A key to the Mechanism's success will be strong support from us, the States Members of the United Nations — politically, by insisting on the importance of justice as part of political solutions; financially, by providing sustainable funding; and substantively, by sharing information and evidence of crimes that are in our possession.

Accountability for the worst crimes imaginable, whether committed in Syria or elsewhere, is essential. But the truth is that there is no remedy and no compensation for these crimes. Prevention is the only effective form of protection. We look in particular to the Security Council for leadership. I thank the 113 States that have joined us in supporting the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Together, we represent a strong majority of States expecting effective action from the Council aimed at ending and preventing such crimes. This pledge could not come at a better moment. The Secretary-General has made prevention a key priority in his agenda, and applying the Code of Conduct works best when there is productive interplay between him and the Security Council.

Never before have the needs for humanitarian assistance been as great as they are today. And never before have we seen such a significant shortfall in our response. The so-called forgotten crises are those that may need our attention the most. Yet our collective attention span barely does justice to even the most visible of emergencies.

Armed conflict remains a key driver of displacement, human suffering and instability. But there are numerous other factors that make people leave their homes. Today, unprecedented numbers of people are on the move across the globe. Across the backdrop of history, there have been various periods of mass migration and there is ample evidence that migration has been a positive and enriching factor for receiving societies. But mass movements of people and irregular migration in particular also tend to create anxiety and fear. Taking these reactions seriously is crucial to overcoming them.

My son, Leonard, entered kindergarten last year. Two children in his group are refugees from Syria. As a mother, I reflected on how this might influence him and his development. What happened was that he quickly learned a few words in Arabic and he knows what a Syrian birthday cake tastes like. He also understands now that there are kids who spend every single night thinking that their house might be bombed.

We place high hopes in the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration that we will adopt together next year. I echo the call of the Secretary-General: migration must be an option, not a necessity. Irregular migrants are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Human trafficking and modern slavery are perhaps the greatest human rights scandal of our time. They are also a global phenomenon and they particularly thrive in circumstances that create high levels of vulnerability. As is the case so often, women and girls are disproportionately affected. Many decades ago, we agreed on the abolition of slavery in all its forms. The relevant legal norm requires universal application. And yet the reality is that there is a disturbing level of impunity for the commission of these acts.

We must no longer accept this paradox. Human trafficking and modern slavery are not just crimes, they are also a profitable form of organized crime. We therefore see great potential here in applying the tools developed to combat other forms of organized crime. Following the money can lead us to the perpetrators of these crimes. In this regard, Liechtenstein is prepared to share the expertise it has acquired as a financial centre committed to international standards of transparency and accountability.

The people whom we serve look to us to reduce risks and defuse tensions. Yet the world is spiralling towards a new arms race. We are facing increased risks of self-destruction, including the unspeakable horror of the use of nuclear weapons. Most of us remember the shocking pictures of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 from our history books. The United Nations was built on the ashes of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and on the promise of "never again", but, owing to collective complacency, we have not delivered on that promise.

This week we have changed course for the better with the signing of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Without any doubt, it will take time to see the Treaty's effects on nuclear stockpiles. Nevertheless, setting a number of important legal benchmarks that will become binding norms is great progress. Nuclear weapons are prohibited and should be eliminated. Their use can never be justified. The suffering that they cause runs counter to fundamental principles of humanity, the basic tenets of international humanitarian law and the dictates of public conscience. On Wednesday, I signed the Treaty on behalf of Liechtenstein as one of 50 signatory States. Together we extend a hand to those who so far have chosen to stand apart. We need their commitment to succeed in finally ridding the world of nuclear weapons.

I have had the privilege to address the General Assembly eight times. On each of those occasions,

I have talked about a particular aspect of the work of the United Nations that is of special significance to me — full gender equality. The progress made in the past few decades has significantly slowed, both internationally and back home. That is a disturbing trend. Commitments have gone unfulfilled and strategies have turned out to be little more than empty promises. The achievements that nobody questioned 20 years ago are now under attack. The level of political participation has decreased, and the statistics on gender pay gaps are still shocking. Yet I remain not only committed but optimistic, simply because I strongly believe that many of our common goals will become achievable only if we indeed achieve gender equality. In the Sustainable Development Goals, the domestic and the international come together. If there is one area in which the United Nations must show the way, this is certainly it.

The work of the United Nations can seem abstract. Explaining its relevance to our citizens at home and to our children can be a challenge. There are topics that make that task much easier, however; for example, climate change. Everyone understands what is at stake in that discussion. If we cannot live on our planet, no one will prosper, irrespective of nationality, gender or economic wealth. And no country, large or small, can tackle the problem on its own. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change does not end the threat of climate change, but it is our only realistic hope for addressing the issue together. I therefore experienced great satisfaction when I deposited Liechtenstein's instrument of ratification earlier this week. Indeed, it is something I will be proud to share with my children.

The President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Nikos Kotzias, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic.

Mr. Kotzias (Greece) (*spoke in Greek; English text provided by the delegation*): First of all, I would like to wish every success to the new Secretary-General, Mr. Guterres, and reaffirm our full support for his work.

Allow me also to congratulate you, Sir, on both your election to the office of President of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session and on the choice of this year's main theme.

Our world is changing rapidly today. We are going through a second era of machines — an era in which machines are no longer an extension of physical strength but provide spiritual wealth and knowledge. Although today they are faster and smaller, they have an immense impact on our daily lives, affecting the way we work, produce, communicate and interact. This new trend could be described as the fourth Industrial Revolution. It brings with it innovations and advantages, as well as challenges, especially for States. These challenges must be addressed in an effective manner if we are to survive in the complex international reality of today.

States have to show resilience and meet the needs of their peoples in terms of human rights, communication, growth and innovation. They have to evolve, but this evolution must linked to that of the Organization. Will the United Nations be able to keep pace with these developments and adapt to new, emerging realities? In the light of this double adaptation, this is an extremely critical time. It will require reforms that can enable the United Nations to remain relevant in an ever-changing world that is very different from the one that existed in 1945. If the United Nations is to retain its ability to fulfil its mandate, it must evolve to meet the challenges before us.

As insecurity and instability abound over large swathes of the globe, Greece is formulating a multidimensional foreign policy with a view to actively contributing to the attainment of peace through concrete proposals in international forums and regional organizations and the promotion of stability through political initiatives. More specifically, we favour the prospect of broadening the agenda that the institutionalized dialogue and cooperation between the European Union and the United Nations is addressing on an already wide array of issues of global concern.

In line with our shared vision, we all want to see a world free of weapons of mass destruction. In that context, we firmly condemn North Korea's ongoing illegal nuclear-weapon and ballistic-missile programmes, including its most recent test, which seriously endanger regional and international peace and security. Considering the developments in disarmament and non-proliferation that we have seen over the past year, I believe that it is now more imperative than ever to seek avenues of dialogue with the participation of nuclear-weapon States. That could be a way to bridge the gap between the step-by-step approach to nuclear disarmament and a non-verifiable immediate and total ban.

While it is situated close to regions that are extremely turbulent, such as the Middle East and parts

of North Africa, Greece continues to be a pillar of stability. In that context, we have recently undertaken many initiatives, such as the Rhodes Conference for Security and Stability and the International Conference on Religious and Cultural Pluralism and Peaceful Coexistence in the Middle East, held in Athens, as well as the recently established Ancient Civilizations Forum, whose latest meeting took place here in New York only yesterday. The Rhodes Conference focuses on a positive agenda of cooperation among 20 European and Arab countries in the Eastern Mediterranean, with the aim of fostering stability and security in the region.

I would also like to mention that, together with Cyprus, in a context of promoting peace and stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, we have established a number of trilateral forms of cooperation that include Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine. Our main objective is to develop a positive and multidimensional agenda for cooperation in international affairs, with a focus on synergies and joint activities, especially through culture, as one of the main drivers of soft power in international relations, and in other areas of cooperation such as trade, education and research.

Enhancing regional cooperation in the Balkans is also the basic principle behind the Greek initiative of quadrilateral meetings launched in Thessaloniki in April 2016 between the Foreign Ministers of Greece, Albania, Bulgaria and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. At their forthcoming meeting in October, with a view to developing an effective response to the refugee crisis that is in line with European democratic values and principles, the four countries will focus on identifying ways for improving their interaction on issues such as return operations, the exchange of information and tackling smuggling, human trafficking, terrorism and organized crime and energy networks.

The Syrian war has taken a terrible toll in human lives and has displaced millions. A cessation of hostilities is essential to ensuring progress in the political negotiations. Greece sees no alternative to a political solution to the crisis, and we fully support an inclusive political dialogue in Geneva under United Nations auspices.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains a constant threat to regional stability and security, and the current situation on the ground is not sustainable. We support a two-State solution, meaning the establishment of a sovereign and independent State of Palestine living in peace and security alongside the State of Israel, while at the same time ensuring that Israel's long-standing quest for security is satisfied.

With regard to Libya, Greece considers the international efforts to stabilize the country to be crucial. We firmly believe that there can be no military solution to the crisis in that country and support every effort to achieve peace and security there.

Terrorism remains one of the major global challenges we face, and the significant progress we have seen recently in the fight against Da'esh deserves special mention. Strengthening international cooperation among all the relevant actors and improving the exchange of information constitute key elements in tackling the flows of foreign fighters. At the same time, we must address the root causes of violent extremism. Greece is actively involved in our shared fight against terrorism. In the context of the work of preventing terrorists from exploiting resources for their activities, we particularly support international efforts aimed at promoting concerted international action against the illegal trade in antiquities and cultural artefacts.

We consistently pursue friendly relations and enhanced cooperation with all our neighbours with a view to promoting stability and prosperity for all. In the Western Balkans, Greece remains a firm supporter of the European Union's enlargement policy. The rise of nationalistic rhetoric in the region is very worrying, however. We want to underline that actions and statements that undermine good-neighbourly relations should be avoided at all costs.

We should also emphasize that we maintain a friendly approach to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Greece's initiative aimed at designing and implementing bilateral confidence-building measures has strengthened relations between us and facilitated efforts to address more sensitive matters, such as the ongoing issue of our neighbour's name. In that respect, Greece will continue its systematic efforts to reach a mutually acceptable solution to the issue of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's name. Our position is clear — the name must be mutually acceptable.

Where Greek-Turkish relations are concerned, we believe they can be built only on a basis of full respect for international law, including the international law of the sea. We have repeatedly pointed out that good-neighbourly relations are not served by a neighbour

that persistently challenges Greece's sovereignty and sovereign rights.

With regard to the Cyprus issue, our objective is summed up in the concept outlined by the Secretary-General at the international Conference on Cyprus — which is to make Cyprus a so-called normal State, one that is sovereign, independent and free of foreign-occupation troops, external guarantees and rights to intervention. Unfortunately, the July Conference on Cyprus in Switzerland ended without an agreement being reached, because the Turkish and Turkish-Cypriot sides were the only parties at the Conference that did not share the goal of the normal-State concept. Greece is prepared to continue discussing the key international issue of security and guarantees as soon as Turkey demonstrates clear willingness to resume negotiations on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions, as well as within the framework of the parameters outlined by the Secretary-General in Crans-Montana.

In the area of civil and political rights, we actively support the fight against racism and all forms of discrimination, whether on religious, gender, sexual or any other grounds. In that regard, Greece, with the aim of prioritizing the safety of journalists and media workers, especially in conflict areas, will submit a relevant thematic draft resolution in the Third Committee at the current session. In the framework of the Human Rights Council, my country has also spearheaded an initiative with its successful submission of a draft for Human Rights Council resolution 35/28, on the convening of the Social Forum in 2018 in order to focus on the promotion of human rights through sport and the Olympic ideal.

Mrs. Pobee (Ghana), Vice-President, took the Chair.

My country remains committed to the protection of human rights in all policies that address large movements of migrants, with particular attention to the needs of migrants, including children, in vulnerable situations. We also believe that implementing that framework correctly is more important than ever if we are to protect those who need it, combat human trafficking and migrant smuggling and return those not entitled to international protection to their homes, while at the same time tackling the root causes of migration through effective cooperation with countries of origin and transit. Finally, the issue of ensuring the social and economic inclusion of legal migrants is equally important and deserves our full attention. Greece has reaffirmed its commitment to ensuring the full and effective implementation of the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants and its annexes, adopted by the Assembly at its seventy-first session. We also emphasize our commitment to working in the context of the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration to be concluded by 2018.

I would like to assure the Assembly that, as a founding Member of the Organization, Greece will lend it its unfailing support as the United Nations works to rise to the task of creating a more peaceful and prosperous future, with justice and solidarity for all, especially for generations to come.

The Acting President: I now call on Her Excellency Ms. Maxine Pamela Ometa McClean, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade of Barbados.

Ms. McClean (Barbados): On behalf of my delegation, I would like to congratulate the President on his election to lead the General Assembly at its seventy-second session and to assure him that he has the full support and cooperation of the Barbados delegation as he undertakes his important duties. I would also like to take this opportunity to commend his predecessor in the presidency, Mr. Peter Thomson, for his able leadership of the Assembly during the seventy-first session. He has been a worthy exemplar of the valuable contribution that small island developing States (SIDS) can make to international organizations, and we are pleased that he will continue to serve the international community.

The theme of this year's general debate, "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet", is a reminder of the purposes and principles that the Organization has embraced from its inception and that are enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. It brings into sharp focus our responsibility to pursue the best interests of the people who occupy planet Earth. For if we fail to advance the causes of security, sustainable development and human rights together, none of them will succeed.

I stand before this organ for the eighth time. On each occasion that I have addressed the nations gathered here, I have issued a caution about the ramifications of unchecked climate change and highlighted the existential threat facing vulnerable small island developing States such as Barbados. In his first address to the General Assembly, in 2008 (see A/63/PV.12), the then Prime Minister of Barbados, the late David Thompson, described the Caribbean as a region at the epicentre

of the global climate crisis. Citing scientific evidence and the devastating effects of climate change that were already evident in the region, he told the Assembly that failure to take urgent, ambitious and decisive action would be nothing short of reckless indifference.

Seven years later, the current Prime Minister of Barbados, Mr. Freundel Stuart, reminded the world that

> "none of the nations represented in this Assembly will enjoy sustainable prosperity if we continue to abuse the environment that we hold in sacred trust for future generations. [...] The very existence of small island States like those in the Caribbean and the Pacific could be imperilled if current trends are not halted or reversed." (*A/66/PV.22, p. 45*)

Many leaders from small island developing States have also consistently warned of the inherent danger of inaction, or insufficient action, to reduce global emissions. Such failures to act imperil lives, livelihoods and the very existence of sovereign States. Year after year, our leaders have warned of the escalating costs of responding to the effects of climate change and of the fact that decades of development gains could easily be washed away in a few hours by an extreme weather event. We have also endured the persistent and frustrating challenge of gaining access to the resources we need to strengthen our resilience and protect our peoples from the ravages of climate change. That is of course owing to a narrow focus on per capita income on the part of donors and international development banks and agencies.

The clarion call from the Caribbean has been ignored, and today we are witnessing the results of that reckless indifference. I regret the fact that I must today report not merely the potential threat that climate change poses to the globe, but rather its destructive impact. I am referring in particular to the utter devastation that we are seeing in several small island developing States in the Caribbean that have been overwhelmed by an unprecedented wave of hurricanes. On Saturday, 16 September, when I arrived in New York, the people of Antigua and Barbuda and of the Caribbean were working feverishly to restore some semblance of order to the islands shattered by Irma, the ninth named hurricane of the 2017 season. A mere two days later, in the early hours of Monday, I read with horror the pleas of the Prime Minister of Dominica when he reached out to the world to share the trauma he was experiencing as his small island was ravaged by the brutal force of nature from the eleventh hurricane in a season that has not yet ended. By the grace of God, Barbados has so far been spared, but we in the Caribbean are one family. We are brothers and sisters, and when one of us is hurting we all feel the pain.

For much of the Caribbean, tourism is the major economic sector, and it has been built on the premise of providing the world with a zone of peace and health. The threat of disease must be avoided. One possible consequence of the recent floods and serious infrastructural damage in the region is the outbreak of disease. Our ability to detect and respond to such biological threats must be strengthened. There must be bilateral and multilateral cooperation in order to minimize and eliminate such threats, and a focus on biosecurity must be part of our response. There must be attention paid to a global health security agenda. For Barbados, as an island State, the ocean is a priority. Ocean governance and the promotion and conservation of marine resources therefore represent one of our primary concerns.

The road to recovery and reconstruction for Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica and the other islands affected by this devastating hurricane season will be long and difficult. I take comfort in the spirit, will and determination of the Caribbean people. We are down but not defeated. Our neighbours in the Caribbean affected by the recent hurricanes can be assured of the full and unconditional support and solidarity of the Government and the people of Barbados. However, our friends in the international community must support the Caribbean region on its journey to rebuild the affected islands. We are all morally obligated to do so. In that regard, I call on the President of the World Bank and on the Secretary-General to convene an international pledging conference on the recovery and reconstruction of the Caribbean islands affected by Hurricanes Irma and Maria. I urge all Member States to support the recovery and rebuilding of the Caribbean.

For Barbados and other SIDS, whether in the Caribbean, the Pacific, Asia or Africa, climate change is a matter of life and death. It is not an issue for sterile debates and endless meetings. For our people, it is about the loss of life and livelihood. For our economies, heavily dependent on tourism, it is about a cycle of constant recovery and rebuilding, which is a serious impediment to sustainable development. Barbados remains committed to ambitious action on climate change. We continue to support the implementation of

the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, and we view the Secretary-General's proposal for a climate summit in 2019 as an important opportunity to take stock and give additional impetus where necessary. Barbados's support for global action on climate change is one part of its overall policy of promoting and protecting the environment. We have taken concrete steps towards building a resource-efficient green economy that is integrated into our national framework for sustainable development.

Barbados would like to take this opportunity to convey its solidarity with the Government and the people of Mexico, who are suffering the painful effects of two deadly earthquakes in quick succession.

A key element of this year's theme is striving for peace. Barbados is a democratic, peace-loving nation. Last year my country celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of its independence, which was gained through negotiation and mutual agreement. We cherish and nurture our political and social stability, based on our history of more than 375 years of unbroken parliamentary Government. We believe that peace is an indispensable prerequisite for sustainable human, social and economic development. For us, it is an essential pillar that supports the national mission of the Government of Barbados, which is based on achieving sustainable economic and social development for the nation, protecting the environment, maintaining good governance and strengthening our citizens' security. We are committed to inclusive development as a means of achieving lasting peace and stability at the national and international levels.

We regret that there can be no peace of mind for the people of the Caribbean who must rebuild their lives and livelihoods. But the mission of the United Nations is to secure global peace. We were reminded by the Secretary-General at the very start of our deliberations that "[w]e are a world in pieces. We need to be a world at peace" (see A/72/PV.3). Each and every member of the international community has an obligation to support efforts and take action to create an environment in which peace can flourish. The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have declared the Caribbean as a zone of peace. I take this opportunity to express Barbados's unwavering support to the protection and preservation of the territorial integrity of our Caribbean Community sister countries Guyana and Belize.

Barbados joins other States Members of the United Nations in the effort to collectively address the many other diverse challenges to which the international community must find and implement solutions. In the past few years, the countries represented here have made historic international commitments, including the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Climate Change Agreement. As an international community, we must now take action to implement those commitments if the destruction I discussed earlier in my statement is to be addressed.

In recognition of the fact that our citizens are our most precious resource, we have been resolute in taking a path of development that is people-centred. Our national policy framework aligns naturally with the philosophy guiding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and that has facilitated our implementation efforts. The Prime Minister of Barbados has clearly emphasized the priority that Barbados accords the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including by appointing a permanent secretary in his office with a mandate and special responsibility to lead the implementation of the 2030 Agenda at the national level.

Barbados has been a consistent and vocal advocate for the treatment of SIDS as a special case for sustainable development because of their inherent natural vulnerabilities. There is a pressing need for the international community to address the specific needs and interests of SIDS in a holistic manner. They will also need effective multisectoral partnerships to assist them in implementing the SDGs.

Barbados welcomes the ongoing efforts of the United Nations to focus international attention on challenges to our oceans and on encouraging the international community to take meaningful steps to protect the marine environment. I was pleased to head the Barbados delegation to the Ocean Conference in June, and I am committed to ensuring our continued active participation on the issue. Barbados is interested in working with United Nations agencies and other international partners to develop an ocean economy trade strategy, as well as effective systems for managing our fish stocks.

Barbados has built an enviable record on the basis of its promotion of social development. Since our independence, successive Administrations have committed to targeted social policies focused on the

people of Barbados. Substantial investment has been made in sectors such as education and health in order to develop a skilled, healthy and productive population. The result of that investment has been a significant improvement in Barbadians' quality of life over the years, borne out in the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Index and other indices that focus on transparency, corruption, gender balance and human rights, among other things.

Promoting and protecting the human rights of all Barbadians are primary concerns for the Government of Barbados. That is in keeping with our commitment to a human rights-based approach to development and our adherence to the principles of good governance and the rule of law, as well as to ensuring that our people have the highest levels of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. We pay special attention to the rights of the vulnerable, including children, women and persons with disabilities. With regard to the rights of persons with disabilities, my Government, together with civil society, continues to make progress in promoting their full integration into mainstream society. Barbados wishes to participate more fully in the activities of the international community on issues of inclusiveness, and are therefore pleased to present Ms. Kerryann Ifill as a candidate for membership of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for the 2019-2022 term. Senator Ifill is the youngest President of the Senate ever appointed in Barbados, the first female and the first person with a disability ever to hold that office, and her candidature has been endorsed by the Caribbean Community.

The Caribbean Community has been at the forefront of United Nations initiatives to address the problem of non-communicable diseases. During this session, Barbados will work with regional and other partners to bring a greater focus to the growing challenge of childhood obesity, a serious problem that could become the next major development challenge. Barbados looks forward to the convening of the General Assembly's third high-level meeting on non-communicable diseases, scheduled for next year. I encourage Member States to participate actively in it, as it will be an invaluable opportunity to strengthen our action on this important issue and move closer to our goal of improved health for our peoples.

Barbados would like to take this opportunity to once again express its deep concern about the possibility of its being penalized for any success that it may achieve in its development efforts. Our categorization as a middle-income country, with the concomitant restrictions on our access to international development assistance and concessionary financing, is unfair and does nothing to advance the cause of sustainable development. We reiterate our call to the international community to create an enabling global environment and partnership for development. Countries such as mine require assistance in building economic resilience; we do not need challenges such as those presented by de-risking, blacklisting and indebtedness.

Transnational crime is a major threat to international peace and security. It can take many forms — trafficking in illegal drugs, trafficking in persons, the illegal transfer of small arms and light weapons, and money-laundering. All present significant threats to our security, and Barbados reiterates its commitment to protecting the security of its people. We will remain actively engaged in cooperative mechanisms aimed at confronting and addressing such challenges.

Barbados welcomes the convening of the third Conference of States Parties to the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). We encourage all States parties to take action to implement the Treaty and we further acknowledge the nexus between the ATT and the Sustainable Development Goals, and their contribution to the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies.

The long-standing economic embargo on Cuba continues to be a cause for serious concern on Barbados's part. We join the overwhelming majority of States Members of the United Nations in opposing that unilateral action and encourage constructive engagement between the two sides.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize Barbados's unwavering commitment to the United Nations and the principle of multilateralism. If we are truly committed to a decent life for all, people everywhere must be heard, including those in small States such as Barbados. We agree that there is need for reform in the United Nations system. However, even as the United Nations is working to reform, and thereby better equip itself to respond to today's global challenges, due care must be taken to ensure that the process is inclusive and transparent. No Member State, particularly the most vulnerable, should be excluded in the restructuring process. Barbados supports the view that a spirit of cooperation and dialogue should be the foundation for our interaction at the multilateral level. Cooperation

and dialogue represent the best means of achieving our international goals and objectives.

The Acting President: I now call on His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the United Arab Emirates.

Sheikh Al Nahyan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to begin by congratulating the President on his leadership of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. We are confident that his deep experience in international affairs will contribute to the Assembly's success, and we stand ready to provide him with all the support and cooperation he may need. I would also like to thank his predecessor, Mr. Peter Thomson, for his stewardship of the previous session.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my country's appreciation for the tireless efforts of the Secretary-General to reform the work of the United Nations in conflict prevention and the achievement of peace and security. We fully support his vision, which requires the international community to cooperate more closely on existing and emerging global challenges.

The foreign policy of the United Arab Emirates is guided by principles consistent with the Charter of the United Nations and the provisions of international law — a spirit of partnership, support for the rule of law, good neighbourliness and non-interference in the internal affairs of other States. They lead us to support a stronger role for the United Nations, along with reform of its entities and systems, so that it can fulfil its mandate to maintain international peace and security and help countries achieve development and prosperity.

The United Arab Emirates works hard and responsibly within its region and beyond to promote the stability and development of Arab countries and tackle the destruction wrought in our region by wars that have left total devastation in their wake. We see security and stability as key to the advancement of nations and peoples, a promising future for younger generations and a decent life for all. Our collective priority must be to promote peace and stability.

Despite serious regional and international efforts, our region continues to suffer from crises whose causes include extremism and terrorism, persistent interference by States in one another's internal affairs, aggressive and expansionist policies driven by hegemonic ambitions, and regimes that seek influence by providing support to extremist and terrorist groups, with the goal of undermining Governments' legitimacy. We must protect that legitimacy and prevent the spread of chaos and conflict throughout the region and the world. These crises have had enormous costs in terms of human life, the displacement of millions and the destruction of infrastructure. If the situation persists, it will generate only more violence and devastation and deplete economic and cultural resources, not just in our region but all over the world. There is no doubt that we as an international community have achieved great progress in confronting security and humanitarian threats, but more can be done to restore stability in the Arab world. The United Arab Emirates therefore believes that we should take the following initial steps in the region.

First, we should safeguard the progress that has already been made on development and counter any hindrances to our collective peacebuilding efforts, or we will be reduced solely to managing conflicts. That applies particularly to Libya, Syria, Yemen and Somalia, countries where comprehensive political solutions are possible and stability can be restored. But that can be achieved only if we end external interference in Arab affairs and suppress all forms of support to extremist and terrorist groups. In that regard, we support United Nations efforts to bring the parties to those conflicts to the negotiating table and to achieve comprehensive political solutions to the crises in our region.

Secondly, we must unite in firm and wholehearted rejection of extremism and terrorism in all their manifestations. That is the only way to confront and eradicate those scourges. We believe that the Arab-Islamic-American summit in Riyadh was historic by any standard. It attracted an unprecedented level of attendance at the highest levels, including the important participation of the President of the United States. Its outcome demonstrated that the Arab and Islamic world has taken a firm stand against the ideological roots of terrorism. We believe that, while eliminating this threat from our Arab region is a difficult task, the campaigns to liberate such ancient and storied Arab cities as Mosul in Iraq and Mukalla in Yemen from the grip of terrorist organizations have shown that we can achieve a great deal if we work together in combating extremism and terrorism.

Thirdly, we must take collective action to identify countries that support and finance terrorism and hold them accountable. That is why the United Arab

Emirates, together with its close allies the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Arab Republic of Egypt, has taken measures aimed at stopping Qatar's support for extremism and terrorism and forcing it to abandon policies that have destabilized the region. We are committed to protecting our national interests, the security of the Arabian Gulf and the stability of our region. The alliances between certain parties in our region with organizations or entities whose goal is to undermine peace and security in the Arab region and the world are unacceptable. That is a gamble in which we will all be losers. Let us stand united against those who finance, promote and justify extremism and terrorism. We have a clear choice, and there is no alternative to combating terrorism in all its manifestations and facing down all its perpetrators, without exception. We must have zero tolerance for those who spread violence, fear and destruction among innocent people or provide support and safe havens to terrorist groups. Together with its friends in the region, my country has therefore taken sovereign measures, in line with international law, with a view to protecting Arab security and standing against Qatar's support to terrorism.

Fourthly, we must promote compassion, tolerance and inclusion, because today more than ever the Arab region needs those values in order to counter the misleading messages and ideologies spread by extremists and terrorist groups, especially through social media. My country is working with regional and international partners to establish mechanisms that can remind our young people of our shared human values and counter the rhetoric of terrorism. Specifically, the United Arab Emirates has established and hosts specialized institutions such as the Sawab Centre, the Hedayah International Centre of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism and the Muslim Council of Elders, whose purpose is to demonstrate the peaceful nature of our Islamic religion and constitute a forum for promoting peace in Muslim societies. We have learned from experience that we must expose extremism and terrorism and the rhetoric surrounding them in order to defeat them intellectually and provide an alternative narrative based on the principle of peaceful coexistence and tolerance. At the same time, such institutions promote a culture of peaceful coexistence and tolerance. It is regrettable, however, that some countries are funding media platforms that encourage violence, incite hatred and sectarianism and provide a forum for the murderous ideologies of terrorism. History has repeatedly shown that catastrophic consequences await those who follow such paths.

Our international efforts to achieve peace in our region will not be successful if we fail to end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territory, which has continued for seven decades. The situation makes young people vulnerable to exploitation by terrorist groups that claim that they are fighting only for liberation and to realize their aspirations.

Iran's hostile and expansionist policies continue to be the common factor in all the crises that our region has experienced, and a real obstacle to any concrete progress in resolving them. Iran interferes in the internal affairs of other States and arms and supports terrorist groups such as the Houthis and Hizbullah, as well as groups and cells in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and Kuwait. Iran has not only blatantly violated the principle of sovereignty but has continued to exploit the crises in the Arab world in order to undermine regional security and incite and fuel conflict. It must realize that only peaceful coexistence, based on mutual respect for sovereignty, is a viable basis for harmonious relations in the region.

From this rostrum, we reaffirm our firm position on the issue of and our legitimate right to sovereignty over the three islands of Greater Tunbs, Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa, which Iran has occupied in violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations. We will not abandon our demand that Iran return the occupied islands to their rightful owners, through voluntary or other peaceful means and in accordance with the resolutions that have been adopted in that regard, together with the rulings of the International Court of Justice.

Two years have passed since the signing of the nuclear agreement with Iran, with no sign of change in its hostile behaviour. It continues to develop its nuclear programme and violates the letter and spirit of the agreement. We therefore support enhanced controls on Iran's nuclear programme and continued assessment of the agreement and its provisions. We view North Korea's similarly provocative behaviour, through its continued development of its nuclear programme and ballistic missiles, as having only one purpose — acquiring further destructive power with which to threaten peace and stability in its region and the rest of the world. Iran and North Korea's aggressive policies are not consistent with their membership in an

international organization whose primary concern is the maintenance of international peace and security.

If we are to restore security in our region and protect our peoples from conflicts and extremism, we must make development, in both its human and strategic dimensions, our top priority. We must create opportunities and hope for younger generations so that they can look forward to a better tomorrow with optimism and confidence. My country is committed to achieving economic and human progress and has contributed to rehabilitation and reconstruction projects in conflict-affected countries in order to enable them to restore security and stability.

We continue our humanitarian approach to alleviating the suffering of refugees. We support refugees internationally and regionally, with a view to protecting them and improving their living conditions by providing humanitarian and development assistance. However, we would like to stress that managing crises by providing such assistance alone is not a sustainable solution if we fail to address their root causes. In that regard, we would like to reiterate the importance of ensuring that the United Nations can arrive at solutions to humanitarian and political crises and address their grave implications, with a particular focus on recent acts of violence and ethnic cleansing such as have been committed in Myanmar against the Rohingya. The United Arab Emirates condemns the violence, displacement and collective punishment that have been visited on the Rohingya and will continue to provide them with assistance in order to reduce their suffering.

In that context, I should also mention the Houthi rebels' obstinate rejection of a political settlement to the crisis and the humanitarian initiatives in Yemen, which is preventing progress from being made on resolving the issue. We will nonetheless continue to work diligently and with determination on the political and humanitarian processes in Yemen, alongside our friends and brothers and under Saudi Arabia's wise leadership, with the goal of addressing the humanitarian and development needs of the Yemeni people, especially women and children, and with a view to restoring stability there.

The United Arab Emirates believes that by looking to the future, promoting human values, working to achieve human development and responding to the aspirations of young people, we can create the foundations for further development and prosperity. My country has moved beyond the stage of establishing its infrastructure and fulfilling basic needs, including by providing health, nutrition and education services, and has adopted a model based on the principles of good governance and values of tolerance and on its vision for building a contented society. We have also created a safe environment that can enable women and young people to fulfil their dreams and ambitions while engaging in their country's development. As a result, we have been able to pioneer innovations and other groundbreaking achievements and have become a beacon of hope for younger generations throughout the region. We are cognizant that our greatest challenge is to make our development sustainable and prepare ourselves for the post-oil era. That will be vital to our survival.

The United Arab Emirates considers its values and principles to be a human and historic legacy celebrated and passed on by one generation to another. We have therefore declared 2018 the year of Zayed, in memory and recognition of the achievements of the founding father of the United Arab Emirates and with the aim of enshrining his values as we continue his journey to build and advance our nation.

We stand at a historic juncture. On the one hand, we have those who pursue peace, development, modernity and the future, while on the other we have those who have chosen darkness, destruction, sabotage and chaos. In that essential and just confrontation, we must stand united. Our goal must be the eradication of extremism and terrorism and the elimination of the forces that are tearing our region apart. We will then have a clear path towards a brighter future that is full of hope.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Tsend Munkh-Orgil, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mongolia.

Mr. Munkh-Orgil (Mongolia): At the outset, I join previous speakers in expressing our solidarity and sympathy with the Government of Mexico and its people and with the Caribbean countries and the United States, which have all been hit by devastating natural disasters in the past few days. Natural disasters across the globe have become more frequent, and their consequences even more catastrophic. By some calculations, their numbers have quadrupled worldwide since 1970. The need for better national and local readiness, and for stronger regional and international cooperation, is growing. As part of those efforts, Mongolia will host an Asian ministerial conference in July 2018 aimed at

implementing the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction more effectively.

Mongolia has been exposed to multiple environmental challenges as a result of climate change, including desertification, drought, land degradation and wild forest fires. The main goals of the Government action plan for the period 2016 to 2020 are therefore preserving a balanced ecosystem, protecting natural resources and ensuring their appropriate use and rehabilitation, and promoting green economic growth. All of us, developed and developing nations alike, are committed to working together to address newly emerging issues induced by climate change. For its part, Mongolia has developed its intended nationally determined contribution and will work to implement its target of reducing greenhouse-gas emissions by 14 per cent by 2030.

The theme of this year's general debate, "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet", captures the main thrust of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. If the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are implemented, they will transform our world. But as important as the SDGs are, we should not overlook the compelling need to fine-tune the overall structure for their implementation at the national, regional and global levels. An important step in that direction was taken at the July meeting of the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Mongolia fully supports the Forum's declaration, which emphasizes the importance of fostering peaceful, just and inclusive societies as well as empowering vulnerable people through collective action.

My country was one of the first to adopt the SDGs. In February 2016, our Parliament approved Mongolia's sustainable development agenda for 2030. It envisages Mongolia becoming an upper-middle-income country by 2030, eradicating poverty in all its forms while preserving an ecological balance and strengthening democratic governance. In parallel with the 17 SDGs, Mongolia's Vision 2030 integrates the three pillars of development — economic, social and environmental. We have mainstreamed its goals into our Government action plan for 2016 to 2020 and other relevant programmes.

Among global development priorities, the special needs of landlocked developing countries are a top priority for Mongolia. According to World Trade Organization (WTO) estimates, landlocked developing countries' trade costs amount to applying a 260 per cent tariff to international trade, and the Office of the High Representative has concluded that on average, such countries' development is 20 per cent lower than it would be if they were not landlocked. Mongolia is committed to the effective implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action for Landlocked Developing Countries for the Decade 2014-2024, along with other landlocked developing countries. It is gratifying to note that, with 10 required ratifications already in place, the multilateral agreement establishing an international think tank for countries such as ours will enter into force on 6 October. The Ulaanbaatar-based international think tank has already begun its research activities, thanks to the financial contributions of the Mongolian Government and other partners. Once fully operational, it will further support landlocked developing countries in their implementation of both the Vienna Programme of Action and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Enhancing connectivity is an urgent priority that all landlocked developing economies share. Mongolia acceded to the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement in 2016. We value the potential of its article 11, on freedom of transit for reducing trade costs and boosting trade for landlocked developing countries, which can help us integrate into global value chains and make the transition from landlocked to land-linked status. In order to further improve market access to its main trading partners, Mongolia is studying the feasibility of free trade agreements with the Eurasian Economic Union, the People's Republic of China and the Republic of Korea. An economic partnership agreement is already in place with Japan.

In order to enhance regional integration in our immediate region of North-East Asia, Mongolia is actively engaged with its neighbours on transit, transportation and infrastructure development. In July 2015, the Presidents of Mongolia, China and Russia signed an agreement to develop a programme on the China-Mongolia-Russia economic corridor. It will focus on the implementation of joint projects to increase trade turnover, ensure competitiveness in goods supply, facilitate cross-border transportation and develop infrastructure. In August, we agreed on our priority projects, and we are in the process of setting up mechanisms to coordinate the actual implementation of the economic corridor.

In December 2016, China, Mongolia and the Russian Federation signed an intergovernmental agreement on international road transport along the Asian highway network, marking another major step in trilateral cooperation. Mongolia is keen to work together with our two neighbours and other partners to improve rail, road, air and energy networks and pipeline infrastructure, and to increase access to the sea.

Mongolia's State energy policy, adopted in 2015, set the ambitious goal of producing 30 per cent of its energy demands through renewable resources by 2030. Our solar and wind resources are estimated at 7,000 and 5,000 terawatts, respectively. With those resources, Mongolia has basically an unlimited potential for exporting clean energy to countries in our region. We are working with our partners to implement the Gobi Tech and Asian Super Grid projects to supply renewable energy to North-East Asia. They offer countries in the region a wide range of economic, social and environmental benefits, including energy security, job creation and the reduction of carbon-dioxide emissions. We look forward to working with bilateral and multilateral partners on those important projects.

When the global community set out on the collective journey towards the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it pledged to leave no one behind. The SDGs have made the reduction of inequalities among people — including the disadvantaged, vulnerable and marginalized — a clear priority for the international community. Sustainable social development is a prominent part of Mongolia's Vision 2030 for the SDGs. It sets out goals aimed at ensuring gender equality, improving the quality of health-care services and access to them, creating safe, healthy living conditions for its citizens, providing everyone with a high-quality education, ending all forms of poverty and enlarging the middle-income class. But while we cannot achieve the timely and effective implementation of the sustainable development agenda without peace and security, peace is being threatened on a number of fronts.

Mongolia is deeply concerned about the escalating tension in North-East Asia. We strongly oppose the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's destabilization of regional security by conducting repeated nuclear tests and launching ballistic missiles in defiance of the international community's will and in violation of the relevant Security Council resolutions. As a country that has had nuclear-weapon-free-zone status for the past 25 years, Mongolia reiterates its principled position that the Korean peninsula should be free of nuclear weapons, and we urge the parties concerned to refrain from any action that could heighten tensions in North-East Asia and to work to resolve the issue through peaceful means. In our view, the only way to do so is through dialogue. One possible avenue for that could be the Ulaanbaatar Dialogue on Northeast Asian Security, which we initiated in 2013. We held its fourth International Conference in Ulaanbaatar in June. The Dialogue discusses not only security issues in North-East Asia but also potential energy and environmental projects, and as such is an open mechanism that can embrace the participation of every country in North-East Asia.

The current tensions have only deepened the concerns we all have about nuclear weapons. Mongolia welcomed the Assembly's adoption, on 7 July, of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. So long as nuclear weapons exist, the risk of their use will persist. The only guarantee of the non-use of nuclear weapons is their total elimination. Pending the achievement of that ultimate goal, it will be critical to ensure the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty as soon as possible, as well as vigorous implementation of the Action Plan agreed in the final document of the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. We must also put an end to the protracted stalemate in the Conference on Disarmament.

Terrorism continues to pose a grave threat to international peace and security, and terrorist activities around the globe remain unabated. We commend the Secretary-General's establishment of a new United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism to provide strategic leadership for global counter-terrorism efforts.

In the twenty-first century, it is disheartening to see the world facing the largest refugee crisis since the Second World War. An unprecedented number of people, including the Rohingya Muslims, have been forced to flee their homes. The horror of the human tragedy that has unfolded during such forced displacements must stop. The current humanitarian emergencies require comprehensive responses that should include three elements — ensuring dignity for refugees, supporting host countries and addressing the root causes of the problem. It is the shared responsibility of all of us to promote the safe movement of persons and to respect international refugee law, human rights law and humanitarian law. Similarly, large movements

of migrants require equally close attention. We look forward to the adoption of a global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration in 2018. We hope it will be a critical tool for protecting the safety and human rights of all migrants, regardless of their migratory status, and for strengthening global governance on international migration.

Today the role of United Nations peacekeeping is growing tremendously. Mongolia is proud to be contributing to its support for the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations. In the past decade, Mongolia has dispatched more than 15,000 Blue Helmets to a number of hotspots and is currently one of the 30 largest troop- and police-contributing countries in the world. Mongolian peacekeepers are known for their dedication, skills and community-friendly behaviour in peacekeeping and reconstruction efforts. We intend to further enhance our contribution by providing engineering and special units to United Nations peacekeeping operations.

As a member of the Human Rights Council, we reaffirm our firm commitment to eradicating the death penalty, torture and other kinds of inhumane and degrading treatment. Four days ago, together with Argentina and the European Union, we hosted a high-level event to launch the Alliance for Torture-Free Trade, a global alliance to end trade in products used to carry out torture and capital punishment.

Strengthening democratic and open societies governed by the rule of law is a long-standing priority for Mongolia. Accountable institutions, access to justice for everyone and the significant reduction of corruption are all key ingredients of sustainable development as envisaged in SDG 16.

At a time when the world is facing myriad global challenges, it is unsettling to have multilateralism questioned. In our globalized world, no State can tackle today's challenges alone. Global issues require global solutions. As a guarantor of security for all nations, large and small, the United Nations is a centre of multilateralism, but we must enhance its role as a centre of effective multilateralism. We commend the Secretary-General's vision of the United Nations as an instrument for a surge in diplomacy for peace, and his recent establishment of the High-Level Advisory Board on Mediation could not be more timely. Its 18 eminent members bring to it an unparalleled spectrum of skills and, most important, the credibility that is essential for mediation.

In conclusion, I want to reaffirm once again that Mongolia fully supports the Secretary-General's vision for reform that can make the United Nations less bureaucratic and more efficient, productive and field-oriented. After all, that is the only way that the United Nations can become stronger and more responsive to the people it serves.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Aurélien Agbenonci, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of the Republic of Benin.

Mr. Agbenonci (Benin) (*spoke in French*): I would like to deliver the following message on behalf of Mr. Patrice Talon, President, Head of State and Head of Government of the Republic of Benin.

> "At the outset, I would like to reiterate my warm congratulations to the President on his election to lead the General Assembly at its seventy-second session and to assure him of my country's support in the fulfilment of his mandate. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank his predecessor, Mr. Peter Thomson, for his efforts. I would like to once again warmly congratulate Secretary-General António Guterres and assure him of our full support and, lastly, to pay tribute to his predecessor, Mr. Ban Ki-moon.
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> "I extend my condolences and my sympathies to the Governments and the peoples of the United States, France, Mexico and Sierra Leone and all the countries in the Caribbean that have been victims of recent natural disasters.
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> "As we move into the active phase of concrete implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, Benin welcomes the theme of this session of the Assembly, entitled 'Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet'. This theme corresponds closely to the guidelines in our Government's programme of action, which places humankind and the planet at the centre of its concerns. Benin, as members know, is continuing its efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals through courageous and necessary reforms.
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> "On 22 September 2016, from this rostrum (see A/71/PV.14), I affirmed that mass poverty is a major threat to humankind, and on that occasion I

expressed the hope that the determination that led the world to adopt the Paris Agreement on Climate Change could lead us to set up a comprehensive programme for the eradication of mass poverty. A year later, that appeal is more relevant than ever, as the situation in our countries continues to deteriorate. Thousands of people are forced to emigrate, in most cases at risk to their lives, with, as a corollary, many security and economic challenges for host countries, as well as significant environmental consequences. That is why I find this theme useful for the sharing of efforts to ensure sustainable human development and the promotion of a world that respects the environment.

"Benin has committed to addressing youth unemployment as a means of eradicating poverty. In accordance with the road map of the African Union adopted by the Heads of State and Government in January 2016, the Government of Benin, in liaison with the United Nations, has drawn up a national road map to take into account the demographic dividend in Benin. The Government's programme of action outlines a number of projects that, when realized, will strengthen sustainable human development.

"The programme, known as Insurance for Strengthening Human Capital, fits into that dynamic. Its operationalization will make health insurance compulsory for all who live in Benin and will make it possible to establish a social protection system for the poorest and most vulnerable. Our programme of action also attaches great importance to the preservation of the environment, and important environmental protection measures are included.

"I believe it is important to take this opportunity to recall Benin's proposal on 15 November 2016 — during the solemn high-level session of the twenty-second meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, in Marrakech, Morocco — to establish an international research centre to respond effectively to the effects of climate change on agriculture in Africa, in conjunction with the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, based in Nigeria. Our hope is that the appropriate United Nations bodies will consider the implications of that proposal, which would make it possible to ensure the sustainable development of agriculture in Africa.

"We are deeply committed to efforts to combat climate change, and we believe that the Paris Agreement is an indispensable tool for achieving that. In that regard, my country supports the various initiatives, particularly those of France, aimed at getting the United Nations to put in place a third generation of fundamental rights that would be embodied in a global pact for the environment.

"Our session opens at a time when the world is facing a multitude of complex challenges. For decades the world has also seemed prone to crisis and in search of meaning. In many parts of the world, peace is seriously threatened and the values of freedom and the rule of law are compromised. Violent extremism and radicalism weigh heavily on international security and stability.

"The assault on multilateralism, and therefore on the United Nations, is part of that pernicious trend that we must reject. That is why, in order to ensure the well-being of African populations and to address those problems effectively, the African Union needs reform more than ever. Benin strongly supports the ongoing reform process and very much wants it to be finalized as soon as ossible.

"Reform of the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, must also proceed so as to increase the effectiveness of the Organization, particularly in the area of peace and security. The composition of the Security Council must be revised in order to take into account the changes that have taken place on the international scene in recent decades. We cannot call for respect for democracy in all countries and, paradoxically, not want it to be applied in reforming the Security Council. That reform, we hope, will make it possible to redress the injustice done to Africa, the only continent not represented in the category of permanent members of the Council. Benin's position on this issue is consistent with that of Africa, as set out in the Ezulwini Consensus. The United Nations, and more specifically the Security Council, also needs a fresh start.

"The important challenges to be met include the settlement of the Palestinian question. The creation of a Palestinian State as a full Member of the United Nations living in harmony with Israel will undoubtedly result in a dynamic that can reduce tensions in that region. We therefore support the

efforts of the United Nations to achieve that goal, as well as the initiatives to meet the conditions likely to promote an international conference on the establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of nuclear weapons.

"I would like to reiterate our commitment to strengthening our contribution to the work of the United Nations and to further working towards the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. The signing in Cotonou on 8 February of the agreement on the status of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali fits into that dynamic.

"I do not wish to end my statement without once again affirming the deep attachment of my country, Benin, to the United Nations, which remains a unique framework for expression, dialogue and action, enabling us to cope in a unified manner with the immense and complex challenges of our globalized world. Multilateralism is an ethical and political imperative for peace. Benin will continue to work alongside all other peoples to build a more just, inclusive and fraternal world order."

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Pehin Lim Jock Seng, Minister at the Prime Minister's Office and Second Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Brunei Darussalam.

Mr. Seng (Brunei Darussalam): I have the great honour to convey the warm greetings of His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di Pertuan of Negara Brunei Darussalam to the General Assembly.

We congratulate Mr. Miroslav Lajčák on his assumption of the presidency of the Assembly at this session. We also thank His Excellency Mr. Peter Thomson, who presided over the Assembly with such dedication during the past year. I also wish to send my warm wishes to our Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, and to praise him for his vision for strengthening our Organization.

Two years ago, Brunei Darussalam proudly joined everyone in embarking on an extended journey to achieve a global set of ambitious goals for sustainable development. For us, that moment was meaningful. It signified our Organization's relentless efforts to bring development and prosperity to all countries, regardless of their size and status in the world. It also showed us what unity can accomplish.

Our theme sums up who it is we are acting for — it is our people. It is therefore important to ensure that we fulfil our promise to them. It is a promise of a future where their hopes and dreams for better livelihoods can be realized. That will require our long-term commitment and significant investment.

In Brunei Darussalam, this means more than just building infrastructure or providing for basic needs. It also means raising decent people, people who care for their society and are committed to their country's development and future. That calls for an inclusive approach, with a priority of focusing on youth development. In today's increasingly competitive environment, Brunei Darussalam firmly believes that quality education is the key to building a new generation of highly skilled, innovative and confident young people.

According to the International Labour Organization, more than 291 million people around the world are estimated to be unemployed this year. Creating job opportunities, especially for our young people, will therefore be crucial to raising their standard of living. In Brunei Darussalam, we are continuing our efforts to diversify our economy and advocate free trade bilaterally and regionally, with the aim of achieving a dynamic and sustainable economy.

While pursuing economic progress, we should be mindful of the correlation between human activities and climate change. That is where the Paris Agreement on Climate Change can galvanize our collective actions to bequeath a cleaner, healthier, safer and more sustainable planet to our future generations. Brunei Darussalam will continue to do what it can to contribute positively towards that end. To reduce greenhouse gas emissions, we are promoting efficiency in energy consumption and gradually deploying renewable energies. At the same time, conserving our forests is a high priority, and that complements our multilateral efforts, including the Heart of Borneo initiative and, recently, the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy. All in all, it is about educating our people to care for and protect our planet. And strengthening global efforts in that area is also important.

For human and economic development to thrive, regional and international peace and security are crucial. That is the basic foundation of the success of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as it celebrates its fiftieth anniversary this year. So, for the

continued progress of South-East Asia and the region at large, it is the responsibility of all concerned to ensure a stable, safe and secure environment, one that is free of conflict, war or the threat of war. We also strive for stronger engagement through confidence-building, preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution through peaceful means. It is through such efforts and close cooperation among ourselves and with our external partners that ASEAN hopes to further contribute to global peace and development.

ASEAN's achievements over the past 50 years in ensuring regional peace and security have enabled Brunei Darussalam to pursue its development objectives in a peaceful and harmonious environment. We are pleased that our country has consistently achieved very high ranking in the Human Development Index of the United Nations Development Programme.

As the well-being of our people continues to be central to the nation, we are mindful of the negative impact of security threats, particularly with regard to our work to ensure a sustainable world. Like many others, we are concerned about the constant threats of terrorism and violent extremism. Sadly, in various parts of the world, the casualties resulting from terrorist attacks continue to shock us all. We condemn such horrendous acts and convey our deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims. We wish to reiterate that terrorism should not be linked to any particular race, religion, nationality or ethnicity.

In order to address those threats, it is important to comprehensively examine the root causes of terrorism, such as poverty, marginalization and alienation, notably among youth. It is our hope that focusing on education and youth development, creating job opportunities, advocating the responsible use of social media and promoting dialogue among different faiths and civilizations will greatly help in our efforts to bring about positive change.

It is equally important to instil in our people's hearts and minds the values of peace, harmony, moderation and mutual respect. It is through those values that we may be able to create societies that are resilient to destructive ideologies. Working closely with youth, religious leaders and local communities will be essential to help to realize that. We therefore welcome all efforts of the international community to prevent and eradicate terrorism and violent extremism, in all their forms and manifestations.

Also of great concern are pandemic diseases and natural disasters. On that note, I would like to join others in expressing our condolences and sympathies to the families of the victims of the recent natural disasters that have affected Mexico, Sierra Leone, the United States and countries in the Caribbean and South Asia. Given the destructive effects of natural disasters on any country's development and well-being, Brunei Darussalam values the work of all relevant agencies, including those of the United Nations, the World Health Organization and ASEAN. They provide us with means to gain expertise and knowledge on how to deal with the challenges posed by such threats.

As we seek to ensure that no one is left behind, we should not forget the plight of those suffering from war, conflict and occupation. Like everyone else, Palestinians have hopes and dreams of being educators, doctors, engineers, artists, athletes and innovators, which are all for the good of humankind. However, for half a century, foreign occupation has prevented many of them from achieving their full human potential for making a greater contribution to global development. Peace, freedom, justice and self-determination are Palestinians' fundamental rights. As the legitimate and truly representative Organization of the globe, the United Nations has a moral and legal obligation to enforce those rights and ensure accountability for actions that contravene international law.

We continue to count on the United Nations, as well as all relevant parties, to find comprehensive and lasting peace and stability in the region. We must press on with all efforts to translate the growing international recognition of the State of Palestine into positive changes on the ground, so that Palestinians can pursue sustainable development in their own homeland.

Brunei Darussalam looks to the United Nations to address pressing issues around the world. It is important for the United Nations to enhance its working relationship with its network of partners, including regional organizations such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the Commonwealth and ASEAN.

In order to better reflect the needs and realities of the twenty-first century, the world needs a stronger, more effective and more efficient United Nations. To that end, we support our Secretary-General's ideas for reforming the United Nations and repositioning our Organization to focus more on measures for preventing conflicts, including mediation. We believe

such endeavours will greatly help the United Nations optimize its work and resources and, above all, save lives, safeguard people's dignity and promote peace and security around the world.

We want a United Nations that is fit for its purposes and principles, as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of all Member States to ensure that the United Nations truly lives up to its name. As we strive for a better future together, we hope for a successful United Nations. A successful United Nations benefits humankind. When humankind benefits, we all win.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Dato' Sri Anifah Aman, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Malaysia.

Mr. Aman (Malaysia): I congratulate Mr. Miroslav Lajčák on his election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. I am confident that under his able stewardship, the General Assembly — the main deliberative and policy-making organ of the United Nations — will see substantial development and advancement in addressing the many challenges that our Organization faces today.

I also congratulate His Excellency Mr. António Guterres on his appointment as the ninth Secretary-General. I assure him that his endeavour to make the United Nations an effective, relevant and august Organization has Malaysia's fullest support and cooperation.

The theme of the Assembly's seventy-second session, "Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet", is most relevant and timely as we work collectively and individually to achieve all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. That journey will not be easy. Some have even proposed that it should be the only focus for the entire international community — to strive towards ensuring our future survival in an inclusive manner. We must strengthen our resolve and fulfil our promise to each and every citizen of the world that no one will be left behind.

On that basis, Malaysia has always oriented its development agenda to accomplish that very promise. Sustainable development has been at the heart of Malaysia's development approach since the 1970s. In 2009, the Malaysian Government launched its new economic model, which features three new goals: high income, inclusivity and sustainability. Those pursuits continue to resonate well with the three components of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development — economic growth, social needs and environmental protection.

We have also adopted forward-looking development policies through the Eleventh Malaysia Plan, which spans the five years from 2016 to 2020, under the theme "Anchoring growth on people". That development plan reaffirms the Malaysian Government's commitment to a vision of growth anchored in the prosperity and well-being of its people, while protecting the environment and strengthening peace.

In July, Malaysia presented its voluntary national review at the High-level Political Forum on SDGs. The review, which reports the actions and measures taken by Malaysia to advance the implementation of the SDGs, is testimony to Malaysia's continued commitment to achieving the 2030 Agenda. The Government of Malaysia strives to ensure that each and every Malaysian has an equitable share in the prosperity and wealth of the country and that no one is left behind

Earlier this week, Malaysia joined other Member States in signing the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. We are convinced that the political and legal impact of the Treaty will steer the international community collectively towards the elimination of nuclear weapons and the maintenance of a world free of nuclear weapons. We were guided by the commitment of States to an instrument that is legally sound and feasible to implement, one that sends a powerful political message that nuclear weapons are categorically unacceptable.

Malaysia strongly believes in continuing to strengthen and enhance legislative and collective enforcement capabilities in confronting international security threats, particularly the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and specifically to non-State actors. We remain steadfastly committed to our international obligations in the fields of disarmament and international security through various national, regional and international approaches.

In that connection, Malaysia reiterates its strong condemnation of the nuclear tests and missile launches of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which seriously undermined the global disarmament and non-proliferation regime. Malaysia calls on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to refrain from

conducting further nuclear tests and missile launches, to halt its nuclear and ballistic-missile programmes and to comply fully with its international obligations in the interests of the maintenance of international peace and security. Malaysia joins other nations in stressing the need for an immediate resumption of peaceful dialogue and negotiations among the relevant parties with a view to finding a durable solution to the long-standing conflict.

We are also seeing a convergence of new security threats emerging from irregular migration and transnational crime activities, which include terrorism, trafficking in persons, illicit drug trafficking, money-laundering and cybercrimes. The threats that we face today have an increasingly regional and international impact, affecting our economies and lives in ways that we have never experienced before. For that reason, Malaysia has made significant efforts to improve its legislation and enforcement capabilities by adopting a holistic approach to preventing and combating those heinous crimes.

Sadly, as we devote our attention to peace, a decent life and a sustainable planet, there are people in the world who are suffering from horrifying crimes against humanity. In the past few weeks, we have seen a recurrence of violence instigated by a delusional and desperate militant group of Rohingya in Rakhine state. However, the subsequent clearance operations by Myanmar have claimed countless innocent civilian lives and caused more than 400,000 Rohingya to flee their homes. The indiscriminate violence perpetrated against the Rohingya during those operations is of grave concern to Malaysia and others. Such atrocities have unleashed a full-scale humanitarian crisis that the world simply cannot ignore and must be compelled to act on.

If the current situation is not addressed judiciously, the desperate people of Rakhine state will become easy prey to recruitment by extremists, for which prolonged frustration, anger and deprivation provide a fertile breeding ground. Although the Myanmar Government has given its repeated assurances that it will implement measures to resolve the issue, the recent incidents of violence have not assuaged our concerns or assured us that effective safeguards are being put in place on the ground. I therefore call on the Government of Myanmar to end the violence, stop the destruction of life and property and allow immediate, unimpeded access for the delivery of humanitarian aid.

I would also like to take this opportunity to commend the Government of Bangladesh for all it has done in receiving almost half a million Rohingya refugees over the past three weeks. Sheltering such a huge number of refugees puts a strain on any country. Malaysia dispatched humanitarian aid to Bangladesh on 9 September and will do more. In the spirit of compassion and humanity, I call on the international community to support the humanitarian efforts in Bangladesh.

Our collective failure to find a solution to the Palestinian question is totally unacceptable. The situation in Palestine remains daunting and appalling as Israel continues to violate international law with its heavy-handed approach to the defenceless Palestinians. As Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory marks its fiftieth year, we must continue to intensify our efforts to find a just and durable solution to the Palestinian question.

Malaysia reiterates that any action by Israel aimed at imposing its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the holy city of Jerusalem is illegal and totally unacceptable. We remain extremely concerned about the lack of accountability for the Israeli occupying forces and the ongoing blockade of Gaza and the resulting humanitarian crisis. We are extremely dismayed at the diminishing prospect of peaceful coexistence as Israel's illegal settlement activities continue unabated.

The implementation of Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), adopted on 23 December 2016, remains a challenge. In that regard, Malaysia reiterates its support for the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and its proactive approach regarding the need for a written quarterly report by the Secretary-General on the resolution's implementation. We urge the international community, especially Member States, to continue to firmly support that vital call. If we continue to enable the resolution to be deliberately weakened in a shameless manner, rendering it unimplementable, we will be guilty of deconstructing any two-State solution.

Malaysia will continue to support the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East. The plight of some 5 million registered Palestine refugees must not be ignored. In view of the Agency's weakening financial situation, we urge the international community to strengthen its

commitment to providing it with financial and other relevant assistance.

In our fight against the scourge of violent extremism, Malaysia would like to reiterate the ongoing urgency of taking a moderate approach to countering the propagation of extremism and radicalization. To that end, Malaysia reiterates the call for a global movement of moderates that Prime Minister Najib Razak made in 2010, with the aim of dousing the flames of hatred and halting the influence of extreme and myopic ideas of intolerance, xenophobia and racial hatred, among others.

It is imperative that communities of different races, religions and cultures band together in seeking common peaceful aspirations and celebrating their diversity, rather than being influenced by and enticed into extremist traps. Malaysia therefore looks forward to bringing the initiative for a global movement of moderates to the United Nations through a draft resolution at this session. It is imperative that the voices of reason, tolerance and understanding drown out those that glorify the extremism that sows seeds of hatred among our communities.

If it is to carry out its arduous tasks, the United Nations cannot afford to stand still and remain idle. Since taking over the helm of the Organization, the Secretary-General, together with the Secretariat, has initiated various efforts to make it more efficient, effective, agile and fit for purpose. Malaysia commends the dynamic leadership of the Secretary-General through his various reform initiatives, which include reviewing the peace and security architecture and enhancing the overall development system and United Nations management reform, among others.

Malaysia is of the view that any major reform initiative that might include cost-cutting measures should not hamper or disrupt the Organization's existing development efforts to achieve peace and a decent life for all. That includes peacekeeping operations, peacebuilding, and development programmes in developing countries, especially in countries in areas of conflict. I wish to express my delegation's full cooperation, support and commitment to working closely with the Secretary-General, all Member States and various stakeholders towards implementing the reform initiatives.

Let us strengthen our resolve in fulfilling our collective responsibilities. I assure the Assembly of Malaysia's continued support and commitment to the agenda of the United Nations and the work of the General Assembly.

The Acting President: I now call on His Excellency Mr. Samura M.W. Kamara, Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of the Republic of Sierra Leone.

Mr. Kamara (Sierra Leone): I bring the Assembly fraternal greetings and very best wishes from His Excellency Mr. Ernest Bai Koroma, President of the Republic of Sierra Leone. President Koroma deeply regrets that he is unable to participate in the seventy-second session of the General Assembly, due to unavoidable circumstances. He has, however, instructed me to deliver the following message.

> "I congratulate the President on his assumption of the responsibility for directing the work of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. I would like to assure him of my personal support and that of my country throughout his tenure. Let me also congratulate and warmly welcome our new Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres. I commend and thank their predecessors, Mr. Peter Thomson and Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for their leadership and outstanding commitment to advancing our collective aspirations and energy, maintaining global peace and security and achieving sustainable development for all, as well as for their concern regarding climate change.
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> "In March of 2018, the people of Sierra Leone will go to the polls to elect their new leaders in local Government, parliamentary and judicial elections. A few months from now, my second term in office will come to an end, and I will be graciously handing over power to Sierra Leone's next democratically elected President. We have had 10 years of working together, 10 years of building and consolidating peace and democracy, of enjoying the atmosphere of a peaceful transfer of power, political party pluralism, a vibrant civil society and a critical media landscape. We are not yet where we want to be as a country, but with the sustained support of the international community, Sierra Leone is not where it was 10 years ago.
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> "Today, a country that was once regarded as a fragile State is ranked the most peaceful in West Africa and about the fourth most peaceful in Africa. We have raised our economy to become one of the

fastest growing in Africa. Even when we were halted and derailed by the Ebola virus outbreak, with the international community's support, we fought hard, and once again we are registering a positive economic outlook.

"As I look back on those 10 years, as I look back on that long and challenging path we have travelled together, as I prepare to step aside, I do so with a sense of pride, a sense of fulfilment and a sense of satisfaction that we have played our parts in the rebuilding of our nation, in transforming lives and in giving hope to millions of people.

"Let me particularly commend the United Nations for its significant contribution to restoring peace, security, stability and economic reconstruction in my country. I am happy to note that today Sierra Leone is described by the United Nations, through the Peacebuilding Commission, as a proud storehouse of lessons for a seamless transition from war to peace, democracy and stability. Those lessons have provided us with valuable and cost-effective tools for the peaceful settlement of disputes and conflict prevention.

"We have always been more than ready and willing to share those lessons with other countries in a similar plight, especially countries within our small g7+ group of post-conflict countries, which are striving to leave fragility behind and promote resilience. We have already held three highly successful and widely acclaimed peaceful, free and fair democratic elections following the end of the civil conflicts. Those are milestones that significantly demonstrate our exemplary performance in the consolidation of peace and security. The elections to be held will be no different in terms of transparency, fairness or credibility.

"The choice of the theme for this session, 'Focusing on people: Striving for peace and a decent life for all on a sustainable planet', is apt and timely in an era of global uncertainties and challenges, including the emergence of new threats that tend to undermine our efforts in the promotion of economic and social advancement of all peoples. For 72 years, through this Organization, we have combined our efforts to prevent a major war and to promote human rights, fundamental freedoms, justice and equal rights for men and women of all races. Yet we are faced with unprecedented global challenges of enormous proportions. The seemingly unending cycles of conflict and violence, the destructive and devastating impacts of climate change, the spread of terrorism and the largest refugee, migration and humanitarian crises in recent history continue to call into question the effectiveness of our present international machinery, as well as our ability to promote sustainable peace and a decent life for all.

"We should therefore generate innovative ideas and credible mechanisms that will bring all conflicts to a peaceful end. We should promote social progress, peace and security, human rights and fundamental freedoms. We must secure better standards of life for humankind. We must remain steadfast in our commitment to building a sustainable planet for present and succeeding generations. This Assembly should, in that regard, reflect on reforms that will reinforce our collective obligation to upholding the purposes and principles on which our Organization was founded.

"The General Assembly has consistently reaffirmed our collective commitment to strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes and in conflict prevention and resolution. It is a valuable and cost-effective tool. It is Sierra Leone's firm belief that we must continue to build on the gains made in our preventive diplomacy efforts, including heightened collaboration with each other and among our regional organizations and actors, making use of experiences that have helped us achieve relative international peace and security.

"In that regard, I am heartened by the powerful impetus of the preferential use of preventive diplomacy and mediation efforts in the maintenance of international peace and security by the United Nations system. The good offices of the Secretary-General, including the early-warning system and the international contact groups, are important instruments in preventing conflicts and must be further strengthened to effectively respond to any crisis situation. The effective utilization of Chapter VI of the Charter therefore remains the best option for the Organization in the prevention and peaceful settlement of disputes.

"Obviously, mediation remains a powerful instrument for the prevention and settlement of armed conflicts and must be utilized to the fullest extent

possible. My country has indeed benefited from mediation efforts under the auspices of the United Nations and the Economic Community of West African States. We have learned from experience that for mediation efforts to be fruitful, they must embrace such measures as the timely cessation of hostilities, credible ceasefire agreements and the timely deployment of peacekeeping and observer missions to be able to undertake and supervise the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and displaced persons.

"Furthermore, the role of regional organizations in partnership with the United Nations must be further strengthened to ensure a greater response at the regional level in implementing preventive measures such as early-warning mechanisms. Regional organizations are usually better positioned to generate the necessary political will for conflict prevention within their regions.

"The role of the Peacebuilding Commission has been exemplary, and its experience, expertise and knowledge in preventing conflicts from escalating into violence or war, as well as in supporting post-conflict endeavours, should be tapped into. In that regard, we encourage the sharing of the experiences gained and lessons learned through the engagement of the Peacebuilding Commission.

"As I have already stated, since I assumed the leadership of Sierra Leone almost 10 years ago, the country continues to make steady progress, particularly in the priority sectors of infrastructure, human development, agriculture and food security, democracy, international relations, justice, human rights and inclusive governance, as outlined in my medium-term development plan, the Agenda for Change, followed by the Agenda for Prosperity. Those transformative strategies have gone a long way to more visibly repairing and healing the damage and scars resulting from a brutal war, while also charting a path for achieving sustainable socioeconomic development and shared prosperity and, more particularly, for transforming Sierra Leone into a middle-income country by the year 2025.

"Three years ago, in 2014, the unexpected and unprecedented outbreak of the Ebola virus substantially wiped out the social and economic fabric and the gains that Sierra Leone had painstakingly achieved over 10 years of progressive post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Shortly after being recognized as one of the countries with the highest growth rate in the world, our economy plunged very sharply, from record high gross domestic product growth rates of 15.2 per cent and 20.1 per cent, in 2012 and 2013, respectively, to record low rates of 4.6 per cent and -21.7 per cent, in 2014 and 2015, respectively. The epidemic revealed fundamental systemic weaknesses that still remained to be addressed in post-conflict Sierra Leone, especially in the health-care system. The fight to end, eradicate and prevent the recurrence of the Ebola virus was largely won through strong leadership, community ownership and national resilience.

"While we were on the verge of turning the corner in our post-Ebola recovery strides, Sierra Leone was severely hit by torrential rainfall in the early hours of 14 August, leading to flash flooding in several areas of the capital city, as well as the collapse of the hillside of Mount Sugarloaf, overlooking Freetown and its environs, causing widespread devastation. The impact has been penetrating and far-reaching, especially for women and children, who were most affected. More than 500 lives were lost, several people were severely injured and traumatized, more than 600 remain missing, around 7,000 were rendered homeless and physical property and assets worth an estimated $30 million were lost.

"This year's rainfall is the third in a series of heavy torrential rains with devastating impact, mostly on vulnerable groups in our cities. Such rains displace hundreds of people, destroy farmland, businesses and properties and cost lives.

"While I once again take this opportunity to thank the international community for its support during these moments of grief and need, let me state that such disasters are a stark reminder that climate change is real. They also demonstrate the level of Sierra Leone's vulnerability to climate change. I therefore reiterate Sierra Leone's support for the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and urge concerted global efforts in dealing with this immediate, real threat to humankind.

"Under my leadership, Sierra Leone has enhanced political stability by strengthening

institutions and laying a basis for good governance by allowing those institutions sufficient leverage and latitude to deliver on their respective statutory mandates. My Government has recorded significant milestones in the areas of gender equality and women's empowerment, as well as in promoting youth employment and empowerment. We have established a more stable and regulatory environment for investment and wealth generation, which in the medium- and long-term will create employment opportunities for the inclusive socioeconomic development of young people, the disabled and women.

"My Government's programmes for local Government and decentralization have provided greater space for wider and deeper community participation in our development trajectory. Furthermore, the launch of the Open Government initiative in 2008, followed by our membership of the Open Government Partnership in 2014, has together created an effective platform for transparent governance and citizens' empowerment, thereby building trust and confidence between my Government and the people. With those developments, Sierra Leone is now on a solid path and will continue to consolidate its transition from war to peace and shore up democratic credentials, inclusive growth and a decent life for all.

"Learning from the Ebola virus outbreak, my Government has responded to the task of building a resilient health system to prevent, detect and respond to any public health threats of similar nature. We have established public-health laboratories nationwide that have full capabilities to test for viral hemorrhagic fevers, including Ebola. The floods and mudslides are pointing us to a greater emphasis on the environment, particularly regarding land management, reforestation, affordable housing, urbanization and upgrading slums.

"While we remain determined to accelerate the positive transformation of Sierra Leone, ensuring that Sierra Leoneans benefit from the dividends of our well-earned peace and democracy, we look forward to more strategic engagement with our partners in effectively implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in Sierra Leone, especially in diversifying our economy, with a focus on agriculture, fisheries, tourism and manufacturing industries, as well as on investment in education and health. Evidence abounds that in those resource-full sectors there is enormous economic potential for public-private sector partnerships and for North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation. We urge our partners to join with us in tapping those potentials.

"As coordinator of the African Union Committee of Ten Heads of State and Government on the United Nations Security Council Reforms, I would like to end my remarks by reiterating Africa's concern about the slow pace of the reform process. We have heard that concern expressed by the current Chair of the African Union, His Excellency Professor Alpha Condé, President of the Republic of Guinea, as well as by several other Heads of State and Heads of Government.

"Beyond the compelling urge to correct the historical injustice done to Africa, we must thoroughly reflect on the current geopolitical realities that generally compel the reform and modernization of the United Nations system, particularly the Security Council. We must also reflect on the continent's numerical strength, its growing economic power, its population dynamics and its increasing role in the multilateral system. Against that background, Africa's demand, as articulated in the Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration, is therefore even more legitimate and ought to be redressed and treated on the basis of equity in the global governance system.

"As we look at the work that lies ahead, let us not lose sight of our shared obligation to ensure a peaceful and secure world by resolving our differences, including national and international disputes, through constructive dialogue. We must respect and prioritize strengthening the existing mediation mechanisms provided in the Charter of the United Nations. I am convinced that the pace of global development and the achievement of peace and security will significantly accelerate if we appreciate the wisdom of redirecting resources from the current nuclear arms race to people-centred development. That will benefit humankind more than a continuation of the ruinous competition for superiority. It will also facilitate the attainment of our desired twin goals of sustainable peace and development.

"As I graciously bow out as President of my beloved country, I will be leaving office with the sincere hope that the successful implementation of the priorities and programmes that I have laid out will enhance Sierra Leone's attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals. I also hope that the international community will continue to stand by the great and resilient people of Sierra Leone in the pursuit of our collective aspiration to become a middle-income country. It is my fervent hope that the current momentum and development trajectory, which are defined by transformative strategies and catalytic actions, will be maintained through a sustained United Nations partnership with my successor. I therefore thank all of our development partners, both at the bilateral and multilateral levels, who have collaborated with us to support the strides that we have achieved during my tenure."

The Acting President: Before giving the floor to speakers in exercise of the right of reply, may I remind members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and 5 minutes for the second, and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Ms. Ivanović (Serbia): My delegation would like to exercise its right of reply in response to the statement delivered by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania (see A/72/PV.15).

At this seventy-second session of the General Assembly, as Member States work to address and find solutions to the numerous challenges that the international community faces, let me underline that the consolidation of international peace, security and stability continues to be a priority for the Republic of Serbia as well. To achieve those goals, my country has invested the greatest possible effort in strengthening regional cooperation, stabilization and reconciliation, for which it has been widely recognized and acclaimed. We therefor fully share the approach and vision of the Western Balkans working together.

During the general debate at this session, numerous dignitaries have underlined the importance of respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all Member States. However, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania again used the Assembly to call on Member States to recognize the independence of the Serbian southern province, the so-called independent State of Kosovo, contrary to Security Council resolution 1244 (1999), the Charter of the United Nations and the principles on which the Organization is based. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister of Albania also misled Member States through his contention that dialogue is being conducted between two States — Serbia and Kosovo — and not, as is the real situation, between Belgrade and Pristina, that is, the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in the province.

Let me recall that all outstanding issues within the process of the normalization of relations between Belgrade and Pristina are being addressed within the dialogue conducted in Brussels, with the facilitation of the European Union. Any unilateral act during the course of the dialogue will only undermine the process. Needless to say, interventions like those made by the Prime Minister of Albania today may jeopardize positive results of the dialogue and set back its progress in the future.

In conclusion, let me point out that settling the status of Serbia's southern province is among my Government's top priorities. We have demonstrated, time and again, our readiness to make an active contribution in the efforts to reach solutions that would be acceptable to all, taking into account the legitimate interests of all communities in Kosovo and Metohija.

Kosovo is not an independent State and is not a Member of the United Nations. Let me be clear and stress once again that Serbia will continue to use all diplomatic means to preserve its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Mr. Al-Kuwari (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation rejects all the allegations and false claims about my country, the State of Qatar, that we heard earlier in the statement by the representative of the United Arab Emirates. Qatar is dealing with an illegal and unjust siege that violates its sovereignty and national decision-making ability.

What we heard today in the Emirates statement is a continuation of the false claims and allegations started by the countries that are party to the siege, including the United Arab Emirates, in an attempt to defame the State of Qatar and damage its foreign policy and its relations with friendly countries. The siege began with acts of air and sea piracy and has included electronic crimes such as the hacking of the Qatar news agency. Those allegations and false claims, which have been going on for three months, have been accompanied by a full-fledged siege that violates all the forms of cooperation

on which this Organization was established. They violate the Charter of the United Nations, human rights and a people's right to self-determination. They violate good relations among States and humanitarian principles. They also violate the charter of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Many countries have objected to the siege and called for it to be lifted. Many have spoken about its negative effects. We have been able to deal with those unjust measures through the unity of our people, our standing in the world and the solidarity that countries around the world have expressed so that we can confront the challenges together. We believe that these illegal measures impede United Nations efforts to enhance cooperation among countries in facing our common challenges.

Despite the many attempts to defame the State of Qatar, we know that the international community is aware of the aims of this campaign, and especially that the countries participating in the siege have failed to prove why they imposed it. They know that their claims are intended only to punish the State of Qatar because we are fighting for human rights, freedom of speech and the peaceful resolution of conflicts. They are trying to force the State of Qatar to change its position.

Qatar's record in combating terrorism is known to all in the United Nations and to our partners in this fight. It is better than the record of those who are stating anything to the contrary, and is illustrated by our participation in the international alliance against terrorism and in other regional and international efforts to that end. The State of Qatar is also working through bilateral mechanisms to enhance regional and international cooperation on fighting terrorism and cutting off its sources of funding. We have implemented our international obligations pursuant to the relevant Security Council resolutions with regard to countering terrorism and ending its funding, whether by freezing assets, preventing subjects from travelling, or implementing other measures adopted by the Security Council. The State of Qatar will always be firm when it comes to implementing Security Council resolutions against terrorism.

In conclusion, we want to state that we are all collectively responsible for respecting the purposes and principles of the Charter with regard to the sovereignty of countries, non-interference in countries' affairs and respecting human rights. We believe that the General Assembly is the most representative forum in the world and the best for defending the Charter and human rights and international law. Instead of accusing Qatar, the Emirates should end all its violations of the Security Council's resolutions on Libya. It should stop creating chaos, launching conflicts and pretending to fight terrorism in order to serve its own interests, knowing that that is leading to more terrorism as a result of their failed policies. We call on the international community to condemn those measures.

Mr. Idrizi (Albania): My delegation is taking the floor in response to the statement just made by the representative of Serbia in reaction to the statement of the Prime Minister of Albania, His Excellency Mr. Edi Rama, this morning in the general debate (see A/72/PV.15). I wish I were not obliged to take the floor at this late hour, but I deem it important to say a few words to set the record straight.

The representative of Serbia questioned the call of the Prime Minister of Albania addressed to those United Nations Members that have not yet recognized Kosovo. Let me recall that Kosovo has been an independent State since 2008 and to date has been recognized by 114 Member States. In the course of almost a decade, Kosovo has established and strengthened its worldwide geopolitical identity and has proved itself to be a valuable contributor to peace, stability and cooperation in the region. Nowadays, Kosovo is a member and active participant in all regional initiatives in South-East Europe. It has signed a Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union and, like all other countries in the region, is working towards future European Union membership.

International recognition and the full participation of Kosovo in all regional bodies have brought clear benefits. They have improved the overall political atmosphere in the region, facilitated trade and economic relations and improved the mobility of people, and young people in particular. We remain convinced that, based on that record, the United Nations and other international organizations would only benefit by the presence and contribution of Kosovo. That is why we firmly believe, as Prime Minister Rama stated this morning, that

> "recognizing Kosovo ... and helping Kosovo move forward ... [is] a direct contribution to bettering the lives of Kosovo's citizens and investing in the

security and stability of the whole region and of all its countries, including Serbia" (*A/72/PV.15, p. 20*).

For several years, Kosovo and Serbia have been engaged in a dialogue, facilitated by the European Union and conducted at the highest levels. That has brought the two countries together in the quest for common solutions to a series of important issues for the good of their citizens. We support that dialogue and encourage both countries to continue to work towards full normalization of their relations as the best investment for them, one offering real prospects towards reconciliation. That is what both Kosovo and Serbia need. That is what the whole Western Balkans must achieve in order to build its present and design their future — a future in peace, a future in Europe.

Mr. Al Musharakh (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): We regret the fact that the representative of the State of Qatar has once again sought to distract all of those gathered here from the international commitments that his country should be upholding. Four countries have taken entirely legitimate measures against the State of Qatar, which claims to be combating terrorism, but in point of fact those States' decisions taken in their genuine efforts to fight terrorism are entirely acceptable under international law and duly take into account the serious violations committed by the Qatar, which finances terrorist organizations.

Our decision to break off relations with Qatar was not a difficult one. Our decision to sever diplomatic ties and relations was a direct response to Qatar's own actions, which have destabilized the region. Qatar meddles in the internal affairs of other Arab States, supports radicalism and fosters extremism in many countries in the Middle East. In point of fact, the State of Qatar is regularly violates international law and the decisions and resolutions of the Security Council. We shall therefore continue, on the basis of the decisions that we have already taken, to enact the measures that we have put in place because we have found no other way to protect ourselves from Qatar's hostile actions.

Qatar has a clear choice. It can either choose to remain a rogue State that does not respect international law or it can choose to be a State that abides by its obligations to the international community. It cannot wear both hats at the same time.

Mr. Elshenawy (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to exercise our right of reply in response to the statement made by the representative of the State of Qatar.

We do not find it odd that the delegation of the State of Qatar is making allegations in order to defend its position after Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain became fed up with the situation and decided to enact legal measures, such as those taken recently, to prevent the Qatari regime from supporting terrorism and interfering in the internal affairs of other countries.

As we all know, the Qatari regime supports terrorism in Syria, Iraq, Libya and elsewhere. It has recently financed terrorism in Iraq, for example, by paying ransom to terrorists. The regime is also providing terrorists with weapons, safe havens and even with Qatari nationality, and it declines to prosecute or extradite them as it is required to do under Council resolutions. It is also very openly instigating terrorist acts. Qatar's support of terrorism, which it has maintained for years, has been specifically mentioned in reports of Security Council sanctions committees, and is known to all.

We all reject the regime's insistence on supporting terrorism. Its continued refusal to get back on the right track is the reason that our four countries decided to take measures in accordance with international law. We remind everyone, particularly the terror-supporting Qatari regime, that fighting and countering terrorism is a commitment and an obligation for all countries, in line with the relevant Council resolutions. The Qatari regime rejects that notion because it supports terrorism.

Mr. Al-Kuwari (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is truly regrettable that the delegation of the United Arab Emirates has once again verbally attacked Qatar. That comes as no surprise in the light of the results of the investigation conducted by the Qatari authorities and international agencies into the hacking of the Qatari news agency a few months ago, revealing that the hacking was carried out by a nearby Gulf State. That crime was accompanied by a campaign of lies and defamation targeting Qatar. The lies included in the statement made by the representative of the United Arab Emirates represent a continuation of that campaign, which everyone knows is fabricated.

We affirm that any allegations of a link between Qatar and terrorism are false and baseless. Those who stand behind that campaign have tried to falsely accuse Qatar of terrorism because of the impact of the use

of that term. Those abominable attempts have failed because the international community refuses to use the accusation of terrorism as a way to single out and berate countries and give them a bad name, thus excluding them from international efforts.

Qatar has made efforts that are supported and commended by many. It is therefore truly ironic that the United Arab Emirates can speak about combating terrorism while some of its citizens have participated in some of the most heinous terrorist attacks in history, while its regime reaps huge financial benefits from terrorism and continues to defy international sanctions.

The meeting rose at 9.40 p.m.